

Bloomington's C & A Shops

Our Lives Remembered

MATEJKA • KOOS • WYMAN

Foreword by Don Munson



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EDITED BY
Michael G. Matejka and Greg Koos

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C&A Shops from Locust Street bridge, c. 1925. (McLean County Historical Society)

Foreword

by Don Munson

I picture a morning in 1922—a crisp fall morning—and there is smoke and soot fighting with the dew for space on the ground and on everything else. The shop whistle sliced through the morning air a few minutes ago and I wonder how anybody on the West Side could have slept through it. I can hear the huff and puff and actually feel the surge of power from the steam switch engines as they shuffle the cars about, making up the trains.

A couple of giant locomotives are edging out of the 44-stall Roundhouse across the Yards. And right behind me—I am standing on Chestnut Street—a group of men in work clothes has alighted from the streetcar and the men are walking down the steps into the pedestrian underpass which will take them under the many rows of tracks into the middle of the Yards.

They have only recently returned to work

after a bitter strike which began in mid-summer. Strikebreakers were run out of town, the National Guard was called out to cool things and the local economy was badly stung. These workers didn't gain a thing in their three-month strike. Still, they seem glad to be busy again.

There is a lot of history here. These Shops turned out the first Pullman car back in 1859 and they built the first commercial dining car—the *Delmonico*—a few years later. Can you imagine rail travel before then? When it was mealtime, the train would simply stop right on the main line. Travelers would hop off for meal at a trackside eatery, then re-board and resume the trip.

The first reclining-chair car was built here, too, back before the turn of the century. This was, in fact, one of the nation's busiest yards in one of its busiest industries. And so it con-

tinues to be.

Bloomington has grown up around it. The 40 acres over which the yards were spread were way out west of the city in the early days, but the term "Forty Acres" now refers more to the neighborhood, occupied for years by Irish families who came here to work. They built St Patrick's Church and School, some proud homes, a few saloons and a number of commercial businesses along West Chestnut and West Washington Streets. Many Hungarians have moved into Forty Acres in recent years. The Hungarian Club, just north of here, anchors their neighborhood.

Hundreds of Germans came here to work on the railroad, too, and settled the other direction from the Yards, on South Hill. Some of them still work at the Yards, but many others have moved into various businesses.

The coal mine just south of here employed three hundred miners a few years ago, but their number has dwindled. And the Chicago and Alton Yards are easily McLean County's largest employer now in 1922.

The West Side is a good neighborhood in which to live. The streets are good—the stretch from the C & A Freight Depot to the Square downtown is probably the best-maintained in Bloomington. And you don't have to go downtown to get a room because the Bloomington Hotel is right here by the tracks. Many of the traveling salesmen stay there.

What is happening right here inside these Yards affects almost every family that lives within earshot of the noon whistle. The workers here are doing something important, build-

ing and maintaining the cars of one of the nation's busiest railroads. It isn't easy work and it isn't always safe. But there is a pride in the craftsmanship that is a part of this place. These people are good at what they are doing. The community appreciates them. The Pantagraph has a reporter assigned to just cover news of this neighborhood. And the public curiosity is so acute that seven thousand townspeople will file through the Yards during a "Railroad Days" celebration a few years from now.

And the future looks as impressive as the past. It is good that Bloomington's economy leans heavily on such a thriving industry—our nation's railroads. Departures are frequent from most cities. The Interurban has filled in some of the gaps in railroad service. And most passenger stations—including the one just behind me on Washington Street—are easily accessible by streetcar.

That is in sharp contrast to the state of automobile travel. There is talk of building hard roads in Illinois, but you cannot drive in any direction from Bloomington after last night's downpour without getting your auto mired axle-deep in dirt-road mud.

A farmer from over near Merna, George Mecherle, has been pulled out of several bottomless mud-holes in recent weeks as he has motored from farm to farm trying to sell his new State Farm car-owners' insurance policies.

Mecherle has an uphill battle. As I stand here watching two thousand good workers head into the C & A Yards to start an October workday in 1922, it is easy to imagine it will always be like this.

About Oral History . . .

by Michael G. Matejka

On the following pages you will find the recollections of 24 McLean County residents, talking about the impact of the Chicago & Alton Railroad Shops on their lives and the local community.

There are a number of consistent themes that echo through these memories: the economic importance of the Shops to the community; the carefully developed craft skills and pride that the Shop workers had; the sense of community and belonging that neighborhood, ethnic identity and working for the railroad produced; and finally the pain that came with the slow closing of the Shops.

At the same time, there are differences in each interview, because this is each individual's particular recollection of events, shaped by their own background and involvement. Thus one might remember union struggles with pride, another completely differently, depending on their own position toward organized labor and their personal involvement. One might see the coming of the diesel as terrible, while the next person might view it as an opportunity.

Oral history is different from other kinds of history. It depends not on written words and careful records, but rather on the memories and recollections of another age.

Thus you may find occasional wrong dates and names here. Where possible we have offered a correction. The majority of references are accurate. The important thing to remember, however, is the spirit and conviction with which these stories were told. There are also ethnic references that would be considered derogatory today, but were common terms of speech in the first half of the Twentieth Century.

One could construct a history of the Bloom-

ington Shops from locomotive orders, personnel records, payrolls and newspaper accounts. A record of this type would give an extremely accurate picture of the business of the Shops, how they did it, and the economic results of that activity.

Missing, however, would be the response of human beings to that business, their own personal feelings, memories, and reasons for doing what they did in that environment.

Oral history fills that gap. Just as Presidents write their memoirs to tell us why they made particular decisions at certain times, we need oral history to help us understand how everyday working people viewed their lives and times. People with polished formal educations—business leaders, lawyers, doctors—can easily take pen in hand and write their life's memories. Most working people exist in an oral, not a written tradition. Grandma and Grandpa share their stories with the next generation over the kitchen table and on the front porch. And Grandma and Grandpa's story disappears with them, unless someone brings a tape recorder or video camera and records that memory for posterity.

Before you in this book you will find the primary source about working for the railroad—the people that actually did the job. They spent their lives around the Shops, their families and neighborhoods prospered and suffered with the economic fortune of the Alton Route.

Although each individual has their special story to tell, there is a real consistency to these memories, which reveals people with a strong identification with their jobs and their role in keeping the nation's primary transportation artery humming.

Thanks to human memory, a sharp picture

of day-to-day working life in the C&A Shops is created here. We can again imagine the daily call of the Shop whistle, the panting locomotives and the earth-shaking thud of the

drop hammer. This tells a story that statistics never will, and lets us enter again the steamy, noisy and proud world of Bloomington's C&A Shops.

Acknowledgements

Just as this book talks about the community that revolved around the Chicago and Alton Shops, it took the help and effort of a whole community of people to bring this volume together.

This project began in 1982, when the Illinois Humanities Council granted moneys to the McLean County Historical Society, the Bloomington and Normal Trades and Labor Assembly (AFL-CIO), and the YWCA to do an oral history of retired C&A Shop workers.

With the help of our two local universities, Illinois Wesleyan and Illinois State University, students were recruited to do the interviews, and participated in an orientation to the Shops.

It took until 1985 to complete this project and to transcribe all the interviews. With this completed the question of distributing these fine interviews was raised. The Illinois Humanities Council was again approached, and with their financial support, the volume before you was made possible.

A number of people deserve special reference. The staff of the McLean County Historical Society has been outstanding and supportive throughout this process. Martin Wyckoff, museum curator, performed the tedious task of proofreading, helped with the layout and design, and offered important criticisms and helpful hints. Museum volunteer Jean McCrossin, a former Shop worker whose interview is included here, corrected names and misspellings, a task that only a former railroader could do. Finally, now-retired director Barbara Dunbar offered her full support and advice at every stage.

Local labor has been very supportive of this effort to preserve the story of some of its pioneer workers. Special thanks are deserved by Ronald Morehead, president of the Trades and Labor, and John Penn and Walt Petry and Livingston and McLean Counties Build-

ing and Construction Trades Council (AFL-CIO). Teresa Matthews, a summer youth worker with the Labor Council, helped with some tedious clerical tasks.

Don Munson of WJBC-AM deserves thanks, not only for the outstanding foreword he wrote, but also for a five-part radio series that was aired at the time of publication. His interest in local history helps keep stories like these alive and before the public.

University staff who deserve special mention include Robert Bray, John Heyl, and Bob Frizzell at Illinois Wesleyan, and JoAnn Rayfield and Mark Wyman at Illinois State. Don Cavallini of Lexington High School aided us in orientating the interviewers, using his own experience with oral history.

A volume of this type is incomplete without photographs, and with the help of *The Pantagraph* we have some outstanding photos to share, thanks to editor Bill Wills and librarian Diane Miller. Interviewees, their families and railroad collectors also shared photos, including Nick Petri, Joe Fellenz Jr., William Munro, Betty Lou Goldsboro, William Dunbar, Kennedy J. Charlton, Tony Koos, Charles Mehl and Walter Hefler.

None of this would be possible without the interviewers and the people who shared their story. One interviewer deserves special mention—Terri Ryburn-LaMonte. Terri was one of the first recruits for this project, and its most loyal. She completed more interviews than anyone else, and without her commitment and personal interest in these workers, this volume would not be possible.

The individuals interviewed included Raymond Bennett, George Broughton, Andrew Backlund II, J. Thornton Belz, Nellie Daly, William Dunbar, Ray Eisenberg, Joseph Fellenz, Sr., Ralph Fisher, Lawrence Hoog, Anthony Koos, Lucille Lasky, Jean McCros-

sin, Thomas McGraw, Thomas L. Moore, William B. Munro, Joseph Dewey Penn, Sr., Ralph Penn, Nick Petri, Sr., Frank Swibaker, John Ivan Tudor, Stephen M. Tudor, Ralph and Helen Young, and George and Cathern Ziegler.

Our interviewers included Terri Ryburn-LaMonte, Mike Mulberry, Mary Beth Heine, Janice Turner, Martin Fitzpatrick, Burton Jones and Mary Dossett.

Thanks are due to Cullom Davis of Sangamon State University for providing an initial evaluation of our collecting process.

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Fred Dolan, of Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, has been of immeasur-

able help in the production of this book. With his steady guidance, this volume made it to print.

Finally, a personal note of thanks to my wife, Kari Sandhaas, for making sure busy schedules were juggled to give this volume the attention it deserved. My toddler daughter, Loretta Santejka, deserves thanks too, for her frequent summer evening pleas of "DaDa, walk to tracks." Walking with her to the Depot, watching Amtrak and freight trains roll through, and strolling the neighborhood helped me reflect again on the Shops and what they meant to this community.

Without all these people, this marvelous story would not be before you. Credit for this volume goes to all of them, and not just the names on the frontplate. The C&A Shops were a community that helped preserve that important history.

August 1987



Machine Shop crew, "Railroad Days," July 1935. (Pantagraph photo)

Bloomington and the Railroad — A Look Backward

by Mark Wyman

You knew you were in a railroad town if you wandered into Bloomington in those days. West Chestnut and other streets on the West Side were jammed with men walking to their jobs at the Chicago & Alton Shops, urged on by the company's shrill whistle—one blast at three minutes before 7 a.m.; later a whistle at noon, at one o'clock, and at quitting time at 4 p.m.

"You could hear that anyplace," recalled Steve Tudor, who worked as a painter in the Shops from 1922 until his retirement in 1969. "Ten or fifteen miles. Pert' near everybody set their clocks by it."

If the city got up with the railroad, it also lived with it, boomed with it, laughed with it, suffered with it. The rhythms of the railroad were the rhythms of the city. With up to 3,000 Bloomington men and women employed on railroads and in the railroad Shops during the industry's salad days of the latter 19th and early 20th Centuries, with 2,000 to 3,000 railroad cars being shifted around the yards at any one time, and with a dozen passenger trains shooting by each way daily, railroading was the bone and sinew, even the heart of Bloomington.

They had their own uniform, these railroad men; their own lingo; their own special skills and senses that set them apart. "The steam boys wore a red handkerchief or blue handkerchief around their necks," Thomas L. Moore told an interviewer. "What was that for, do you know? It was to keep cinders out of their necks . . .," explained Moore, whose Bloomington railroad experience ran from metal inspector to trainman to switchman.

Even their words were uniquely their own—a separate idiom spoken from coast to coast, but only by railroad men. "Railroad language is a language all by itself," agreed Ralph

Young, onetime electrical supervisor in the Shops. They "doubled" on a hill, argued with "McAdoo Mechanics," and in the process devised a heterogeneous conglomeration of words that were a "complete mystery to a layman," explained William K. Dunbar, a longtime railroad telegrapher:

. . . we were 'brass pounders' and everybody had their own term: a yard person was called a 'mud hop', 'cause they had to go out and get around the trellis, or they were called 'lumber grabbers' because this is what they did, they grabbed the lumber off the sides of the cars; and machinists were called 'nut spreaders', and the list goes on and on . . .

Years of work on the railroad developed in them special senses, senses which eventually seemed innate, such as recognizing individual engines and their lines by their sounds. Thomas Moore recalled that with the sharp crack of a steam engine's exhaust "we could almost tell from five or six miles out of town which engine was approaching." With one engine—the 5297—"I can tell it no matter where it was," he added. "It was very similar to the whistle of the Wabash; they had a different sound than the ones on the Nickel Plate or any of the other ones. We could tell which way that the engines were coming in, from the east or west, the Nickel Plate and the New York Central, because they had a different sound than ours did."

In the Alton Shops the Bloomington workers earned a reputation for skilled, painstaking work. Tom McGraw, a machinist, recalled B&O motive power superintendent George Emerson's praise for the Shops' production after that line took it over:

. . . everybody workin' on the B&O, when they got an engine out of Bloomington—boy, they wanted them engines . . . Boy, you could

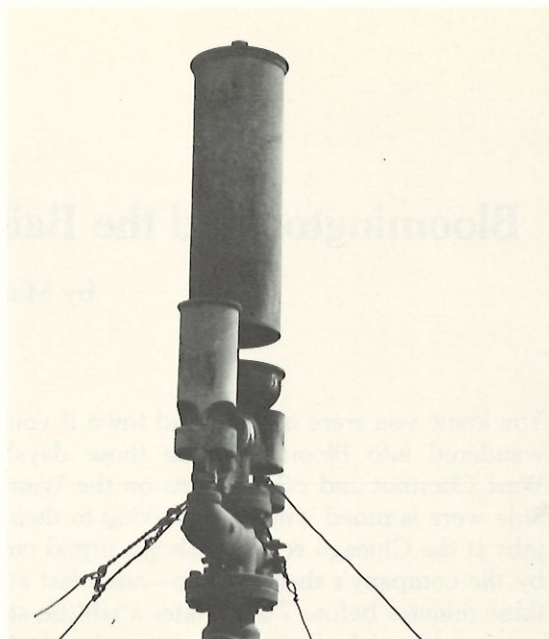
go anyplace in the world and they'd say, 'boy, we like them engines from Bloomington.'

Others found that when they worked elsewhere on the line—in Chicago, in St. Louis, in Roodhouse—that reputation had traveled ahead. Tom McGraw got a call when he was stationed in Springfield to fix a switch engine; the foreman said “You're another one of them smart sonofabitches from Bloomington, huh?”—but McGraw and his friends soon had the engine repaired and working again.

Within Bloomington, the railroaders dominated economic, social and political life to an extent unknown before or since—even State Farm and Illinois State University cannot approach that level. Store managers and clerks looked forward to the Shops' twice-monthly paydays, offering liberal credit to railroad men and their families. Young men sought jobs there—“Practically everybody went to the railroad if they could get on 'cause that was about the best paying job around here,” according to George Ziegler, whose forty-one years as a railroader began with shoveling snow from piles of lumber in 1929, and ended in 1970 when he retired as chief clerk in the Engine House. Railroad men generally lived near their work, in that era before the automobile, as Nick Petri recalled in a look back on his years in the Shops since 1929:



Timekeeper sounds the Shops whistle, 1944.
(Pantagraph photo)



Shops whistle. (Pantagraph photo)

Anything west of the railroad track and Market Street north, was the West Side and that was the old—as we say—the old Forty Acres, and then from Market Street south on west of the railroad tracks was Beich's—the candy company and all that, was the old Swedes . . .

John Tudor told of the variety of places to shop in the railroad men's area:

Seeger's had a store up here on the corner of Jackson and Morris Avenue. It was a good store to trade with. You wouldn't have to go to any other store . . . We bought everything from there. Then Charlie Payne used to have one where the Red Fox is at. We went over there too. We bought most of our clothes at the West Side Clothing Store."

William Munro told of his neighborhood on West Chestnut, where he worked as a boy for Rodgers Notion Store, one of the "going stores" on the street.

. . . and then there was Rodgers Grocery Store on the corner of Mason and Chestnut Street, which was in business for a good number of years . . . Right across from Rodgers at the corner of Chestnut and Mason, was Muhleisen and Ryan, a butcher shop . . . Down further on the same side of the street was Haffner's Drug Store; they cashed many of the railroad checks on the 13th and 28th. And across from that was Byrne's Barber Shop, it said BYRNE, Eddie Byrne's Barber Shop, which was quite a place in those days. It was always a very good barber shop.

The railroad filled in also—with the C&A Hotel where engine crews would stay; the “Beanery,” a popular eating place for railroaders, and even a C&A Library, by the tracks on West Chestnut. The Library stocked books, newspapers, magazines, and was open to railroad workers and others. Nellie Daly, who grew up in the neighborhood and whose father and brother worked for the railroad, called it “quite a wonderful Library, they had hundreds of volumes on everything.” George Broughton, a former machinist and diesel supervisor in the Shops, recalled librarian Maggie Fenton, a cripple: “Dear old lady, she wore all her hair on top of her head like a beehive. She had glasses on her nose.” Checking out books was no problem, according to Nellie Daly: “. . . you’d tell Maggie that you were taking a book out and she’d say, ‘Okay, Honey.’ Haha. That would be it. I don’t remember having any library card.”

Schools in the area were heavily dominated by children of these workers. Thornton Belz, longtime Roundhouse foreman, noted that at St. Patrick’s School, “there wasn’t hardly a child in there that wasn’t a son or daughter or a relative of a railroad employee.”

The link between school and railroad went beyond kinship, however. Youngsters from St. Patrick’s and other schools in the area were often hired by the railroad as “callers”—rousing sleeping employees to come to work on irregularly departing freight trains or filling in for absentees. Jean McCrossin, who grew up in a railroad family and later worked in the division accountant’s office, recalled that her uncle got his first railroad job as a caller when he was 15: “His job was to go around to the engineers’ and firemen’s homes and arouse them when they were called out on duty because none of them had telephones.” Nellie Daly said neighbors would hear boys making their rounds: “. . . you could hear them many times in the middle of the night calling ‘Frank’ ‘Frank’ and rapping on the window. ‘Number 80 North. Two-thirty. Are you awake?’”

The highlight of the year—the time when all the railroad shopworkers, machinists, wheelman, painters, and others were on display—was Labor Day. George Broughton looked back with nostalgia on the Labor Day parades held until the late 1920s.



Shift change, Machine Shop, 1944. (Pantagraph Photo)

They are plenty of them, they were beautiful . . . The Carmen's Union had a whole freight train made out of wood showing those things being pulled down the street. They had engines and a tender and a bunch of little cars. The Blacksmiths' Union in there mounted presses up on hay racks, pulled them with horses, and they would be up in there heating iron and bending iron for the blacksmiths. The boilermakers would be pounding on pieces of metal that they did for the steam. Beautiful parades in those years.

Massive Labor Day parades—callers in the night—throngs of men and women heading for work each morning—these and a thousand other incidents went into the history of the railroad and railroaders in Bloomington. This account will attempt to summarize that story, remaining fully aware of the truth of what one former shopman said in cautioning outsiders. Ralph Young thought back on his thirty years in electrical work in the Shops and concluded that railroading is “a special thing all on its own.” He added:

And you can't read it, you can't get it out of a book, you can't pick it off the street, you just have to have the experience. And someone is dedicated, it gets in your blood.

The Background of Railroads

Perhaps Bloomington was destined to become a railroad center, for the city wasted few decades in welcoming the Iron Horse after its first appearance in England in 1825. America launched its own railroad era in 1828, when Charles Carroll, last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, turned the first spadeful of dirt for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's track.

From then on it was a sporadic, leaps-and-bounds growth, moving ever nearer to Illinois and the frontier, as Eastern cities sought to draw in the produce of the surrounding countryside with canals, plank roads, and railroads, all the while seeking to thwart their commercial rivals. These ambitions were notably present in that young upstart on Lake Michigan, Chicago.

Chicagoans saw that Illinois's major asset, the rich soil of her prairies, was of little use until farmers could have easy access to railroads. Such dreams helped goad other communities and capitalists across the state as well, and a multiplicity of railroad lines were planned in the 1830s and 1840s. “Hurry up the

railroad!” was the cry—but few lines were started, still fewer completed. The first steam railroad in Illinois opened in 1838 at Meredosia, and ran a full 23 miles. But the first line of any importance was not completed until 1850, when the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad reached Elgin and Aurora; back at its Chicago station, owner William Ogden peered out from his tower with a telescope and called down arrival times to people waiting below.

These early developments were often crude and imperfect, but the potential for bigger things was becoming more and more apparent. A letter writer in 1848 told Chicago newspaper readers of the rewards that awaited if a line could connect their city to the Gulf of Mexico:

There is no railroad in contemplation which is of anything like the importance to us of this, by which a communication is opened from the Lakes to New Orleans at all seasons of the year. The trade of the West, and of the regions about us, **must** come here; but that from the South may be made to take one or more routes to the Eastward far to the South of us. Our only chance of securing to Chicago is to push (to Chicago the trade) from the Southwest . . .

Private financing was the source for most new railroad lines in that turbulent era, but promoters of the proposed Chicago-to-New Orleans line came up with an alternative: if Congress would grant public land to the involved states, the states could convey this land to the railroad company to enable it to raise capital. First used with the Illinois and Michigan Canal in the 1830s, this system would be adopted later in the 1860s and 1870s by many of the lines pushing westward across thinly-populated areas from the Mississippi to the Pacific. But its first use for a railroad was with the Illinois Central.

And so the IC was born, thanks to the 1850 land grant which gave Illinois—and then the company—2.6 million acres of public lands. Groundbreaking for the IC was Dec. 23, 1851, in Cairo and Chicago, and contracts were soon let for work on the twelve divisions laid out between the two cities. In the Spring of 1852, contracts were advertised for delivery in Bloomington of 20,000 ties (“of good white or burr oak”), and the call went out for laborers—mainly Irish and Germans who were recruited in eastern ports.

As work pushed ahead on the Illinois Central, other lines were active also, eventually criss-crossing the state in that decade. The IC reached Bloomington in 1853, but so did another line: the Alton and Sangamon, later renamed the Chicago and Alton. When the IC completed its planned 705 miles in the fall of 1856 it "was easily the longest railroad in the world," according to railroad historian John Stover. It was also the largest single private undertaking yet in American history.

In later years Bloomington would welcome additional lines—the Indianapolis, Bloomington & Western (now Conrail) in 1870, the Lake Erie & Western in 1872 (now the Norfolk Southern), and eventually others that would use the C&A or IC tracks to connect between Chicago and St. Louis or other points.

But Illinois was frontier then, and frontier areas were unable to supply the rails, bridge iron and other equipment needed to build a railroad. This was noted by the *Charleston, (Ill.) Courier* in 1852, when it reported that one of the contractors on a rail line reaching that city "has arrived at the eastern end of the line with his engineers, tools and laborers, all which he has brought from the East." In fact, most railroad equipment through the 1850s had to be imported from Europe, with steamboats unloading materials at Mississippi or Great Lakes ports, wagons then transporting them to the construction sites.

Bloomington at that point entered a new stage in its development. Untouched by a navigable river because of the vagaries of topography and geography, the city was nevertheless midway between Chicago and St. Louis and offered a logical spot for railroad shops. As early as 1853 the Chicago & Alton opened a Bloomington shop for its line, to manufacture needed items and repair others; by 1856, 150 people were employed in the "Alton Shops."

This brought more than employment to Bloomington. Railroads were the most modern activity in America then—and having two important lines go through the city was comparable to possessing a rocket launch pad today. Across America, the needs of the railroads provided such an economic stimulus that by 1860 the most technologically advanced mills in the United States were those

producing railroad rails. In Bloomington this meant that the Shops called forth new machinery and especially new job skills—bringing an influx of European workers and Americans who could adapt to and guide the fast-developing industry of railroading.

It was not at all remarkable, therefore, that when George Pullman conceived his plan for a luxurious railroad sleeping car for night travel—the "Pullman Palace Car"—he turned to the Chicago & Alton Shops in Bloomington in 1857 to have it built. Pullman's first dining car, the "Delmonico," was finished in the same shops in 1868. As C&A business expanded in the post-Civil War years, it constructed in 1880 a Locomotive Shop, Boiler Shop, Foundry, and Store Department at its Bloomington site. Electric cranes were added in the 1890s, large 40-ton devices capable of hoisting entire railroad engines.

Highly skilled workers by then were turning out myriads of specialized parts, as evident in Steve Tudor's recollection of a German pattern maker:

... he made every piece on an engine out of wood and made it perfect. And then they took it over to the Foundry and they used that to make the mold for the pieces of the engine. The Cabinet Shop out there made every piece of an engine. They didn't order it built someplace else. They made it there and built them.

By the 1890s, according to ex-Locomotive Shops foreman Joseph Schneeberger, the Bloomington Shops had everything required to build new steam engines—new boilers, cylinders, frames, truck and driving wheels, were all made in the Shops. It was all a far cry from the pre-Civil War days when railroad companies turned to Europe for everything from tools to rails.

Ownership, meanwhile, continued to undergo shifts and permutations as the industry experienced the shocks of fitful growth in America's "Gilded Age," the post-Civil War years. In 1899 the voracious Harriman interests took over the profitable Chicago & Alton, giving way in 1904 to the Union Pacific and Rock Island; in 1907 the Clover Leaf line won control, followed in 1929 with the first ownership of the line by the Baltimore & Ohio, which renamed it simply the "Alton." In 1942 the Alton went back into receivership, until it was purchased in 1947 by the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio, which still controlled it in 1972 when

the GM&O merged with the Illinois Central to become the Illinois Central Gulf—finally uniting Bloomington's two main railroads.

The Corporation as Employer

The men who labored for these railroad companies, in the Shops or as operators or section hands, found themselves in occupations characterized by interdependence, the pinpointing of responsibility, numerous job dangers, and seasonality or lack of steady employment. Government regulations increasingly became part of the railroaders' lives, first with farmers demanding fair and predetermined shipping rates, eventually including the railroad workers themselves who fought for protection from the whims of management as well as for safer job conditions.

Interdependence was forced on the industry from its first days, as construction crews laying down rails performed set tasks under rigid schedules and tight discipline, a far cry from the independence of farmwork which was the cultural heritage of most. An Illinois editor was impressed with this work organization as he stood observing a crew constructing a new rail line in the early 1850s, with "every man knowing his place and having a part to perform in the economical arrangement."

The system was developed extensively in the C&A Shops, where hundreds of men of

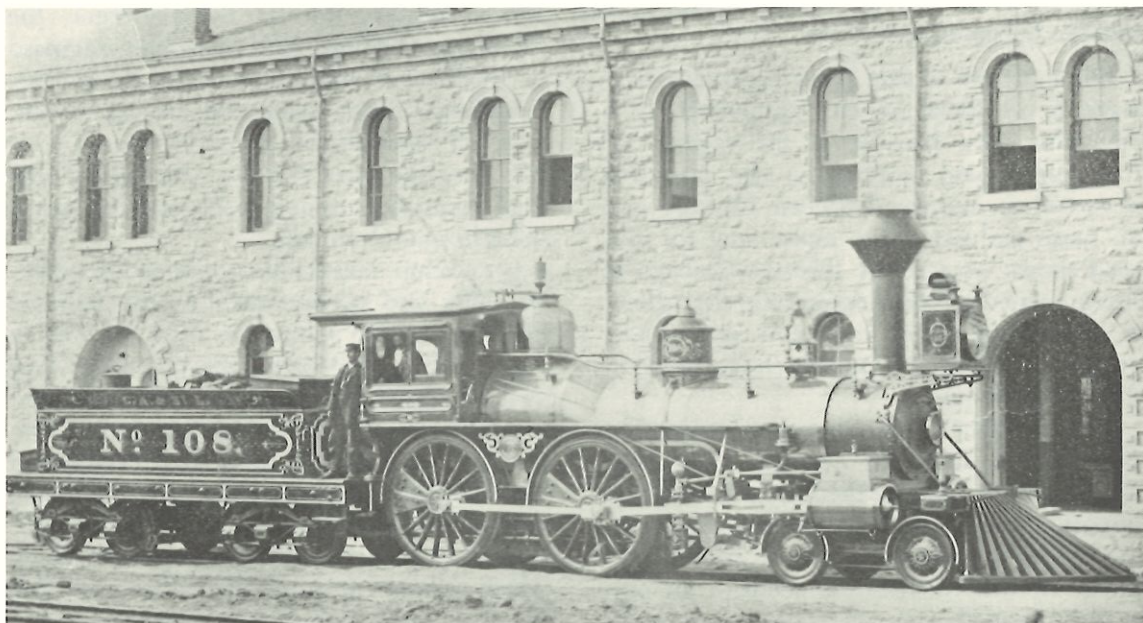
differing backgrounds and skills were brought together to construct and repair locomotives and railroad cars. When one steam engine—number 5299—was hailed for having gone 589,571 miles in six years on a single set of flues, the writer of an undated Pantagraph article indicated some aspects of the complex nature of shopwork:

Engineers and firemen are given credit for properly blowing down of the boiler to expel sediment, prevent foaming and scale, and for proper handling of the fire.

Boilermakers receive much of the credit for fitting the boiler properly when it received its last flue removal inspection, six years ago.

But the chemists in the Water Department, who treated the water and kept on the alert through those six years to vary the water treatment with each change of season, or of the water supply, receive a good portion of the congratulations . . .

Later governmental regulations and inspection put further emphasis on painstaking detail in railroad work, although most early legislation focused on freight rates. The successes of Illinois farmers in bringing the lines under some control in the 1870s spread to other states and eventually won approval from Congress in the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887. What this signified was that the railroads as common carriers were open to governmental regulations, and soon trains, rail lines and



C&A 108, an "American Standard" locomotive, was built in Bloomington, c. 1870.
(McLean County Historical Society)

work sites were being inspected for unsafe conditions; eventually this extended to setting limits on the hours of labor, passing minimum wage laws, even settling strikes. The Chatsworth (Ill.) train wreck of 1887, when more than 80 people were killed, helped spur further railroad safety regulations. By 1900, 75 percent of the nation's top locomotives were fitted with air brakes and 96 percent had automatic couplers. In 1907 the federal government put a 16-hour limit on the daily labor of railroad trainmen on interstate lines; in 1916 Congress specified eight hours as the basic workday for overtime purposes.

Meanwhile, Congress and the courts had demolished the old Fellow-Servant Rule, which for years had blocked railroad workers from collecting damages from their employers for job accidents involving a fellow-worker. The federal government established company liability for railroad workers' job injuries in a 1906 act. Other safety acts came in rapid succession during the Progressive Era—the Ash Pan Act of 1908, requiring locomotives to have an ash pan that could be emptied without requiring a worker to be underneath; the Boiler Inspection Acts of 1911 and 1915, and the Newlands Act of 1913 establishing a federal mediation board to solve railroad labor-management disputes.

The trend continued to World War I, when the government took over the nation's railroads; the lines later reverted to private ownership despite a determined effort by the railroad brotherhoods to block the move. In the New Deal of the 1930s came a different type of government intervention; the Wagner Act of 1935, guaranteeing labor's right to organize, followed in 1937 by the Fair Labor Standards Act which set minimum wages and maximum hours, while banning child labor.

The increase in government regulations and the growth of competition pressured railroad lines to cut costs. One way was to decrease the labor force any way possible at any time, even temporarily. "Railroads are funny places," recalled Helen Young, a former clerical worker in the Alton Shops; "they'll lay off and then will call back, then they'll lay off and call back. They are sort of erratic . . ." Raymond B. Bennett echoed her sentiments; in fact, the unsteadiness of the work finally drove him

away from his job as an upholsterer in the Shops.

We called the men who had quite a bit of seniority the ones with whiskers. We younger people didn't have enough seniority so we would be the first ones to be laid off. Sometimes, we would be laid off for a month or two out of a year . . . There was one year I was laid off more than I worked.

A problem in wartime was that engines and cars frequently had to be kept in use continuously—a troublesome rule for painters who had to put several coats of paint and varnish on the vehicles. Steve Tudor told of having to paint trains during World War II: painters would ride the train to Chicago, and paint lettering and stripes while it was in the station there; then ride it to St. Louis and work on it again there. "Because they didn't want to take it out of service. Then we would come back home . . ."

The coming of the diesel engine proved disruptive for railroad workers. Bloomington saw its first diesel engine in 1936 when the B&O transferred its engine number 50 to the Chicago-St. Louis run; use of the new type of locomotion continued until the GM&O—which took over the Bloomington Shops in 1947—became the country's first line to dieselize completely.

Nick Petri worked for years supplying castings, bolts, nuts, and other equipment in the Shops for the steam engines; then in 1946, he recalled, the switch to diesels meant purchases of castings went out "because diesels were mostly electric and that changed quite a bit from there and that changed the whole operation of the railroad where you always bought a lot of coal and that and then you went to oil, fuel oil and so forth on your diesels . . ."

In the new era, fifty diesel engines pulled three times as much freight as 360 steam engines had earlier, and soon the labor force was cut more than half. There was now no need for the men in the coaling towers at Pontiac, Lincoln and other locations; water stations were also unneeded and section crews could be reduced because wear and tear on the roadbed was less. George Broughton remembered the changeover:

The younger ones got laid off and the older ones stayed there. They would say, "I am not going to work on that." I had some of them in

the place down there, they would say, 'I am not going to work on that thing; I am going home'—and they would go home and come back in a few days and would try it again . . . They all took the pension as soon as they got old enough. The old story you can't teach an old dog new tricks, well you can't teach a man that worked on steam engines for 40 years, you can't turn him over and make an automobile mechanic out of him overnight.

But the diesel was accepted. —Accepted by George Broughton, accepted by Thomas Moore ("It was more economical to run the diesel and cleaner; it wasn't nearly as fun as running the steam engine"), accepted by a public that wanted more efficient transportation.

But what shines through the reminiscences of these railroaders—despite the trauma of the changeover to diesel, despite the frequent lay offs—was the overall good relations with management. Foremen and bosses were referred to in familiar terms by most—"old man Esch," "Mugsy McGraw," "Clooney in the Ticket Office." Thomas Moore said "the old-timers liked the old railroads because we worked for the family and as a family . . . The personal touch isn't there like it was when I started. That's what I liked." Others recalled managers who backed them up in tight spots, who wanted the job done right even if costs rose, who bent over backwards to help them in difficult times.

The Workers

The men and women employed by the Shops and on the operating lines knew lengthy apprenticeships, varied job skills, pride in their craft, and after-work hijinks ranging from lunchbox pranks to potluck suppers and sports activities. The legacy also included job conditions that would be difficult for today's workers to imagine (even for office employees: Jean McCrossin recalled that the division accountant's office was so cold and drafty in the winter that the girls put their feet in wastebaskets to keep warm).

Training was lengthy—apprenticeships of four and five years were common—but the product was workers with extensive skills. Nick Petri told of his wonder at his father's knowledge of metals—"He was able to sign his name but that was it. But he knew metals. It amazed me that he could tell one piece of metal from another . . . To me that all looked

alike until he explained what the difference was . . . He was great at that."

For Raymond Bennett, upholstering in the Shops meant much more than padding passenger seats:

We did all the carpet work for the passenger cars and the wooden cars. We did the mattress and the seat work. We did floor work and curtain work—(The cars) had a padded roof. The upholsterer's job was to take, stretch, what we called mule hide; it was an artificial leather, and we would stretch it out along the top of the cars . . . The upholsterer's job was to insulate all the air-conditioning pipes, all the air-conditioning units and things like that. It was interesting.

Listen also to Thorton Belz describe the day-to-day objects of his machinist's work to an outsider, starting with a crank pin:

That was out of the center portion of the wheel and there was one on every pair of driving wheels. And the rods were coupled to it . . . And we would take the tires, see them wheels were not solid for drivers. They had tires on 'em.

The outsider asked: a plate of metal?

All the way around. And they were machined to the shape of the tread of the wheel . . . they were made of steel but they were a real tough, hard steel . . . we had a 100-inch boring mill and we could put them on there and bore 'em and turn 'em before we put 'em on and we could turn them on the wheels themselves because we had some great big lathes . . .

What emerged, after the months and years of training, was an employee who had pride in his work because he knew that what he was doing took enormous skills to be done right—and he was doing it right. Anthony Koos, whose coach experience in the 1920s and 1930s included inlaying different types of wood in the company president's car, said the "special feeling you would have is that when you were finished, you were a true craftsman." Lawrence Hoog had the same feeling as a car painter: ". . . we would have to prime it and paint it and putty all the holes and sand them down. Then, came two or three coats of varnish and then the lettering. It would take a long time . . ." And Hoog added: "We really did a good job."

The feeling of being a craftsman came from creating something. George Broughton told of what he saw in the Shops, where "you went in

there and took a chunk of iron and you got to make something out of it. You made a part for an engine." Or you told a blacksmith what you wanted, and he would make it for you and "then you get a blueprint out and you would read it. You would put that in the lathe and turn it in, wound up to what you wanted for the steam engine."

They admired fellow workers for their skills. Many old railroaders talk of how another worker could paint, or turn out a part, or run the crane or bring in the engine. Thomas Moore praised Jakey Mose, who "could set his air brakes and by the time he got to the Depot he wouldn't drag that water crane three feet. There was about a ten-foot space there that he stopped in that we could water the tender without having to move, so he was an artist."

But artistry faced difficulties amid the smoke and din of the Roundhouse. For another part of the railroaders' tales centered on job accidents—many capable of being fixed up by "Doctor Iodine," the Shops' medical helper, but others of a more serious nature. Many former railroaders can hold up hands with fingers not quite intact, as Joe Penn noted in describing how a cable broke on the crane and "took that right off—right off you know, cut it right off . . . and then the old doctor—you know what he done? He just taped that on there and I went back to work."

Other recalled men whose lungs were filled with paint, or fellow workers killed in a fall, cut in two by a rolling car, or deprived of limbs. Tom McGraw saw a worker stepping off an engine "and he fell in the cinder pit and Dick Berry was comin' by there and the engine run over him and cut the hand off and one leg and Dick Berry took balin' wire and tied him up and kept him from bleedin' to death." Ray Bennett recalled his father's story:

. . . a fellow went down in there to clean out the oil tank and there was still some gasoline in there and with the torch. Well, this fellow came out of that opening sky-high. When he fell to the ground, of course he was dead.

Running through the railroad years of Bloomington there was an undercurrent of grief. Nellie Daly, whose father suffered permanent disability from a fall in the Shops, has recollections of numerous accidents and said that "If anybody that belonged to the

Shops got hurt, why everybody that worked there felt it . . . felt like it was part of the family. I recall so many that had only one leg or one arm or something that were hurt in the Shops.

What lightened this grief—made it more bearable—was the camaraderie of after hours. Shopmen had sports teams and battled each other on the volleyball courts, the baseball diamonds, the horseshoe pits of the West Side. At lunch-hour there were pranks—switching lunches, inserting a piece of copper in a friend's sandwich, greasing wheelbarrow handles or nailing shoes to the floor. And there were family picnics and potlucks—occupational groups together. Once the carmen even put on a theatrical production.

The Railroad Brotherhoods

Another unifying spirit came from the union movement.

Railroaders wasted little time in organizing, both across the nation and in Bloomington. The same year that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers organized nationally, in 1863, the brotherhood's Local #13 was founded in Bloomington. Two years later the Machinists' Association was formed in the Bloomington Shops, in 1874 Iron Moulders Union #157 organized members there, and other locals appeared over the years: The Locomotive Firemen in 1876, the Conductors in 1884, the Trainmen in 1885, Boilermakers in 1890, Blacksmiths and Car Painters in 1902, Coach Carpenters in 1906.

The drive to unify these separate brotherhoods made sporadic progress, starting with the Knights of Labor in the 1870s and 1880s, yielding to the American Railway Union of Eugene V. Debs in the 1890s. These movements had to confront hostile employers, often in league with the government, as well as a railroad work force that was compartmentalized by job skills. The railroad brotherhoods always rebounded, gathering strength and coming together when necessary.

This was the situation in 1922 when the nation's railway unions rebelled at a second wage cut authorized by the Railroad Labor Board. Bloomington workers—most of whom were part of the American Federation of Labor's (AFL) System Federation No. 29—supported the strike; one worker said the choi-

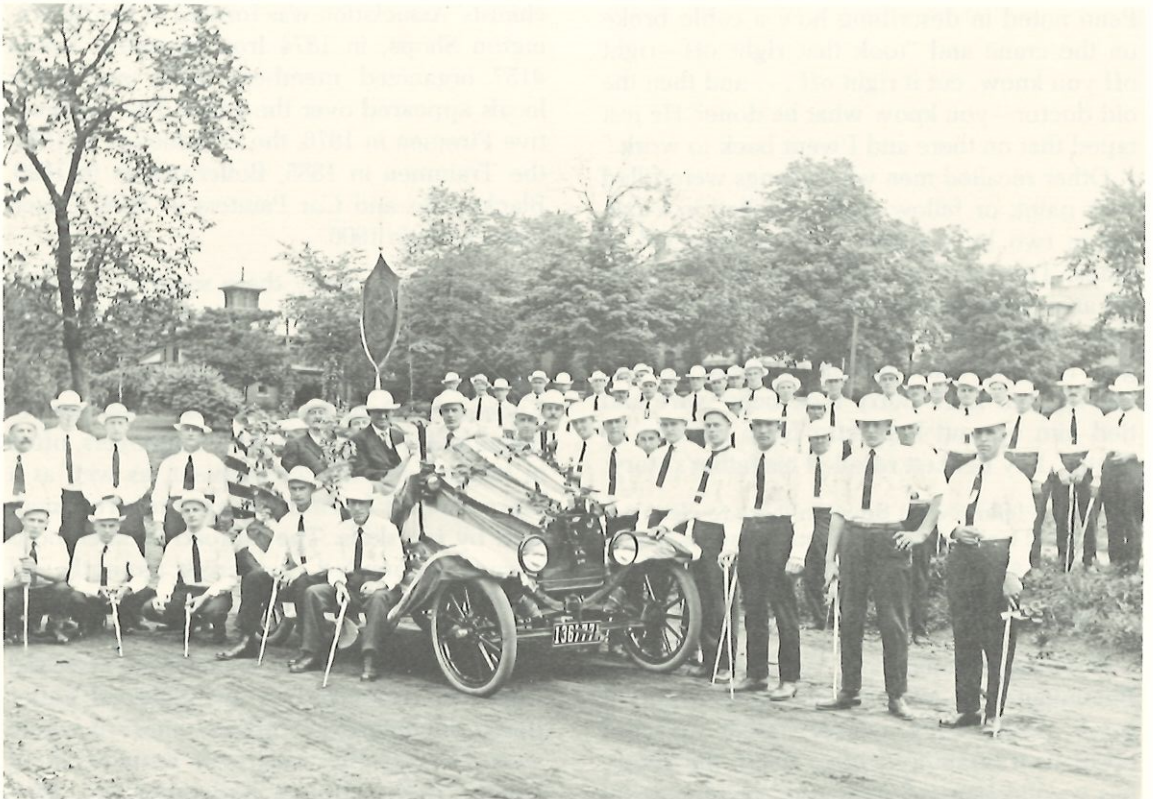
ces confronting the men were to quit, starve, or organize. Before the strike ended three months later, Bloomington was the scene of an influx of highly-paid “scab” (non-union) workers imported by the Chicago & Alton for shop work, protected by an encampment of National Guard troops. The city witnessed a number of incidents of name-calling, violence and sabotage.

When the shopmen returned to work under a federally-sponsored agreement, bitterness had become part of the city’s railroad scene. It remained for years. Thornton Belz recalled that a scab had written in chalk on the side of a firebox: ““We got the dollars, now you can have the cents.”” One of the strikebreakers who stayed on after the strike was later caught in a drill and seriously injured: “Nobody went near him.” Nellie Daly remembered how the strike broke up friendships.

My younger brother, the plumber, he had a very dear friend; they were babies together. They were almost like twins all their lives, and he went in (to work during the strike) and my brother never had any use for him after that. He did everything under the sun to get back in my brother’s good graces but he never made

it. It was terrible to be a SCAB.

The union movement was especially important to the old-timers who remembered earlier conditions. Severely weakened in the 1922 strike, the brotherhoods built support slowly until they boomed during the 1930s. “You’re just a number to the company,” said Nick Petri, “and it’s only through unionization that you will get in any better benefits.” Those benefits included set pay rates for specific jobs, paid vacations, the right to file grievances over company practices, and especially the right to base layoffs and fill new positions by seniority. George Ziegler told of using the system when he bid for a job “and then they kicked me off of it and they paid me for the difference, the wages of the job I was on and the wages of the job that I bid in.” The reason: “They went down to St. Louis and brought a fellow up to take the job in the Storeroom, that I had bid in . . .” As Nick Petri concluded: “So the benefits are so great under a union, you don’t realize it after you get in there, but you didn’t get it overnight either.”



Shops' Sheetmetal Workers Local, Labor Day Parade, 1917. (McLean County Historical Society)

The Community

The community's support for the Railway Brotherhoods during the 1922 strike, when stores extended credit to strikers (not repaid in some cases for two or three years) underlined the reciprocal nature of the Bloomington-railroaders relationship. Not quite like husband and wife, yet not parent and child either, the city and the railroad workers relied upon and drew strength from each other. Their association can be seen in many ways, going back to 1867 when the city raised money to rebuild the Alton Shops, destroyed by fire; this was repeated in 1910 in a successful campaign to retain the Shops by expanding them. But smaller, human items appear over the years also: children rummaging in the yards for discarded coal and old cross-ties to use as fuel at home; families boasting three generations of railroaders; the storekeepers' joy when payday arrived in the Shops; Bloomington girls refusing to dance with strikebreakers, a barber refusing to cut the National Guardsmen's hair in 1922 (and his shop was shut down).

Divisions within the community also came partly from the railroad workers: management and employees, but especially through different ethnic groups among the workers. Irish and Germans were distinct peoples in the Shops as in the city. Although most railroaders state that they were seldom aware of separateness based on national origins, others recall this as a very real part of their jobs and neighborhoods. Anthony Koos was aware of this in the C&A Cabinet Shop:

... there were eight benches that rotate. As an apprentice, I had one up to the front, the outside, up against the wall, and right next to me, to my left, was a German. In behind him was an Englishman, behind me was a Swede, then another German, then another Swede and the foreman was a Swede. Those men, as cabinet makers, they were real good.

Nick Petri, of German-Hungarian background, saw ethnic differences in Bloomington, for although he lived only two blocks from St. Patrick's "we couldn't go there because we were German Catholic, so we had to go to the German school and we had to walk across town to go over to St. Mary's School." But heading south to St. Mary's did not mean traveling into South Hill, Petri

cautioned—"you couldn't go across there. Especially—you could never date a girl out of your area. No way. Back in them days. Anybody that would come from the other parts of town over in our area—as we say as soon as they would cross the West Side tracks, they were always dumped into the horse water trough." This is "unbelievable," he admitted, "but then that's the way it was."

Germans faced special difficulties during World War I, when St. Mary's eliminated German language instruction and Germanness all but disappeared from the city. Frank Swibaker recalled that when other Shop workers heard men talking German they "had to tell them to cut out the German talk and talk English or we'll put you out of here." Bloomington's German festivals also came to a halt with World War I, Swibaker added. Petri remembered that despite such moves, German preaching continued at 8:30 a.m. Mass at St. Mary's; in his own home, however, a portrait of Franz Josef, the Austro-Hungarian emperor, was thrown out when America entered the war.

Others brought a different perspective to the ethnic issue. Joseph Fellenz, who retired in 1962 after almost 44 years in the Shops, arrived in the United States in 1903 as a German-speaking Hungarian and later became a charter member of the American Hungarian Club, one of the city's major ethnic organizations. He recalls the typical pattern of one immigrant family writing back to Europe to encourage another to come to America (a pattern that scholars today call "chain migration"). Sometimes, Fellenz said, his family would speak German in the home, "but then we'd switch right back to American. You forget which language you're speaking. A fellow once asked me if I spoke Hungarian and I answered him in German, saying, 'No, I don't speak Hungarian.' I knew that much."

Summing Up: The Special Men Called Railroaders

"The ranks are getting thin," observed George Broughton as he reminisced about old times in the Shops. Children of former railroad men now drive cars to jobs in air-conditioned offices at State Farm, which has replaced the C&A as Bloomington's major employer. The West Side struggles to avoid

becoming a forgotten area.

What was the reality of the railroaders and Bloomington's past? What is there to hold on to, today?

The sheer joy of railroading, for one thing. Joe Penn tried to explain the emotion, the feeling a railroad man had for his occupation. "It's something you like to always be doing. You want to be around it . . . It just was something inside you and you couldn't get it out, it stayed there. I loved it." Bill Dunbar noted that while railroad pay was good, more than that was pulling him:

. . . I grew up right beside the tracks: those big engines would be rolling through town trying to get the train up the hill, and the bulb would be going in a circle and the whistle piped down and the drivers rolling, and it was a sight and sound that you become addicted to . . . and there is something magnetic about the sight of the steam engine when it went by, and the sounds that they make. Many, many people have gotten smitten by this . . .

Part of the reason oldtimers talked so lovingly of the steam engines, Dunbar went on, was that the machine's characteristics seemed almost human:

. . . you sort of felt with steam locomotives you let it tell you what to do, if it was laboring then you'd change the reverse level little by little bit and got more steam into the cylinders, and that kind of thing. And, of course, rhythmic sounds about them, there was the clapping of the rods, of course, and the exhaust, and the boiler toiling and a different kind of machine all together.

Part of it also was the camaraderie, feeling you were part of a large body of workers, all engaged in the same endeavor, all hard-working and covered with honest sweat. Asked his fondest memory of the Shops, Frank Swibaker's response was immediate: "The men you're working with. You were working with the best kind. We always got along well together . . ."

Others echoed Swibaker's comments, or supported them indirectly through glowing comments on other employees (Nick Petri described one fellow worker as "A short guy who loved to sing and everytime after work if you got any place with him in a tavern you had to stop and sing.") The feeling even extended to clerical staff; Jean McCrossin said she felt a kinship, "sort of a fraternity" with others who worked for the Shops, who helped

each other out. "It was something sort of exciting about working for the railroad," she added: ". . . You had a feeling you were kinda special . . . It was more than just a job." Once laid off, Thomas Moore admitted, you tried to go back, because "if you once worked for the railroad, it more or less got in your blood."

Asked to define the best job in the Shops or on the railroad, the former railroaders generally picked the job they themselves had performed for twenty or thirty or more years. Joseph Fellenz, a crane operator, responded, "The best job? I had the best job! Whenever there was lifting to do, there was a lift I could use. I had a seat to sit in . . . I kept everything greased such as bearings that kept the cranes running. If I didn't have anything to do, there was a seat where I could sit down." Raymond Bennett, an upholsterer, answered that he would "stick with upholstering." And when the question was put to George Broughton as to the best job, he replied:

I had it . . . I enjoyed the Wheel Shop job because it was a challenge. We never had any problems, it was a beautiful challenge. We went in on Monday morning; you looked around and see this doggone gang of fellows out here and you thought, "My gosh, I am supposed to make wheels with that bunch?" So you got busy and made wheels . . . We averaged turning out, repaired or new, somewhere around 450 to 500 pairs of wheels a month.

These men who had the best jobs, the men who kept the engines and the cars running for the C&A, the B&O, and the GM&O, now face the reality that the place where they spent their working years—the buildings and yards once alive with activity—are in ruins.

Joseph Fellenz lives nearby on the West Side, and cannot avoid glancing at his former place of employment: "I don't go outside that I don't look over there. I go out in the yard and I can see the Shop over there. Every time I look over there just to see it. I drive over the Locust Street bridge and I got to look over there." Others find the experience more painful, such as Helen Young, who made a brief visit and felt "it makes you sick because there is nothing there at all anymore." Lawrence Hoog and his brother, a former employee, stopped by also: "We went back and looked at the old Paint Shops and the Coach Shops and it almost made me cry . . . When I

worked there it was about a thousand or fifteen hundred people working there and when you look there now it is all empty." Ralph Young, however, was forewarned of the conditions: "... I don't know whether I want to see it or not," he admitted. "I want to remember how it was."

When they look back in memory, some of them catch distant glimpses of the celebrations, the parades, the big events. After the B&O took over the Shops in the early 1930s it held a gigantic open house, when some 10,000 persons toured the Bloomington Shops. Ray Eisenberg recalled how the buildings were cleaned and painted, with stands and flags

prepared: "We all worked that night, and of course we all have clean overalls and clean uniforms on. People would go around and ask questions about locomotives and mechanics would tell them, and show them different things."

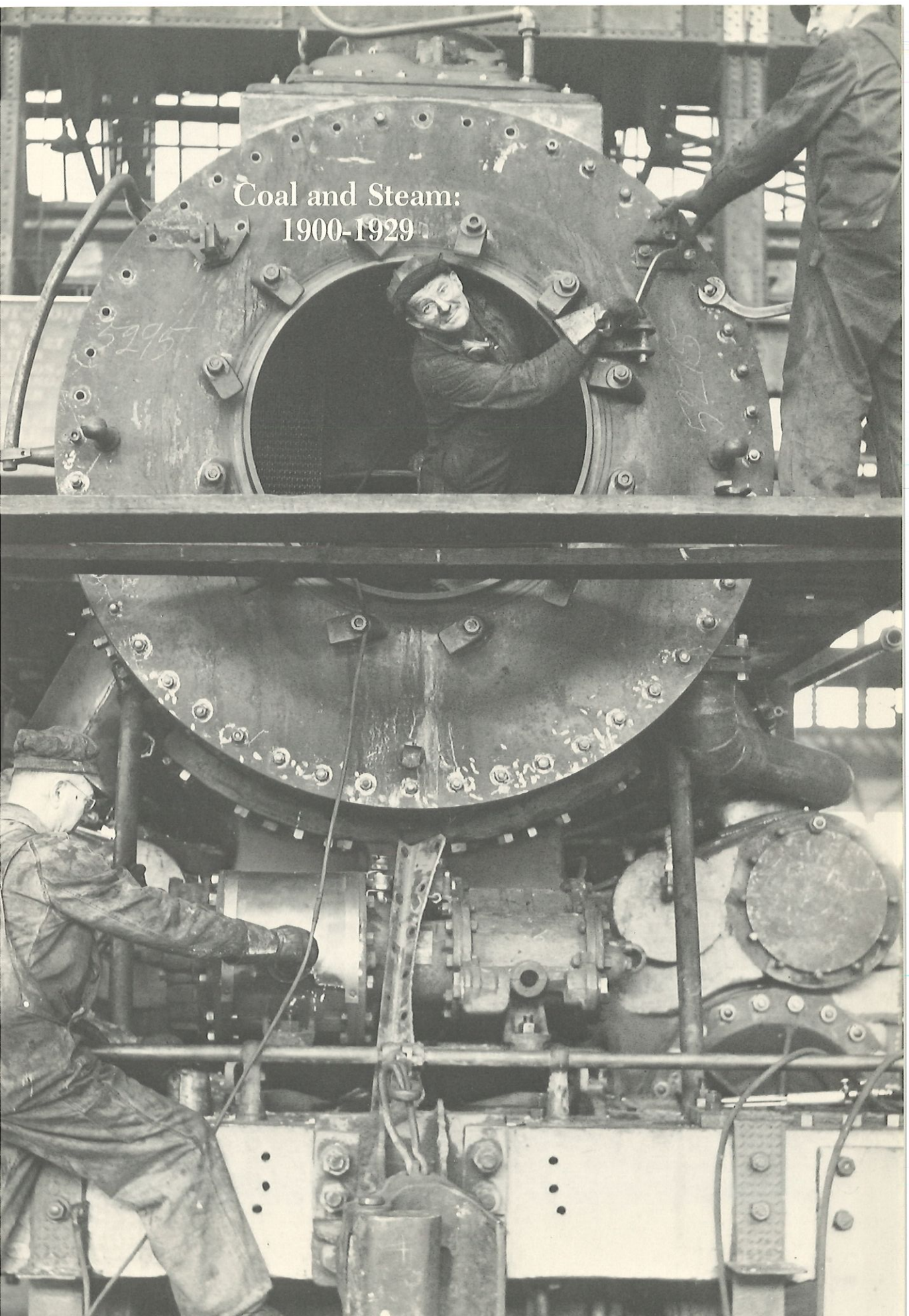
But such an open house is no longer possible. Railroad men with red handkerchiefs and oil cans, you noon-hour pranksters and union militants, we now have only your words, these precious reminiscences, to lead us again through those exciting years when the steam whistle blew and the Alton Shops boomed and Bloomington was truly a railroaders' town.

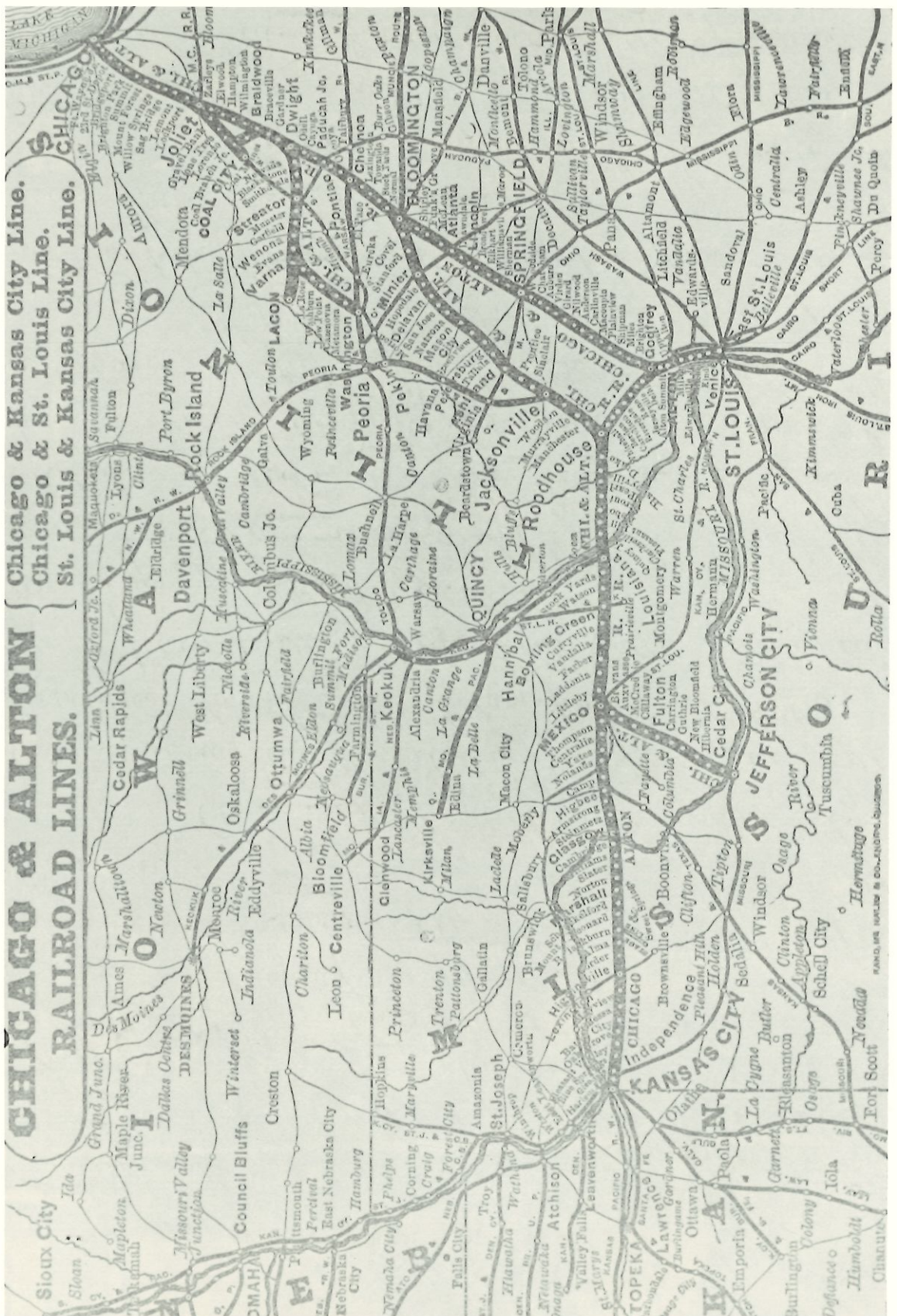


Billy Wells and his engine. This was a "shop mule," used to shuttle dead locomotives and cars to the repair facilities. x. 1935. (Pantagraph photo)

Boilershop, 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

Coal and Steam:
1900-1929





Ray Eisenberg

Ray Eisenberg was born in Bloomington in 1902, started work at the Chicago and Alton shops in 1919, and retired as a supervisor in 1973. His story tells the sporadic and often itinerant nature of railroad work. It took Ray from 1919 until 1926 to get on the machinists' roster in Bloomington, with numerous layoffs and interruptions in between. In order to work he found himself at all ends of the C & A, from Chicago to St. Louis and Kansas City, eventually commuting from Bloomington to Venice and fourteen years to hold his first supervisor's job. Finally he acquired enough seniority to return to Bloomington and finish his time here. His story offers great detail on the thorough and often challenging job it took to overhaul and keep a locomotive running.

Childhood

My father's father was born in Luxenberg, Germany. My step-father was an engineer. I went through high school and I just thought I wanted to work for the railroad. So I started young. When I quit, I had 54 years service with the railroad.

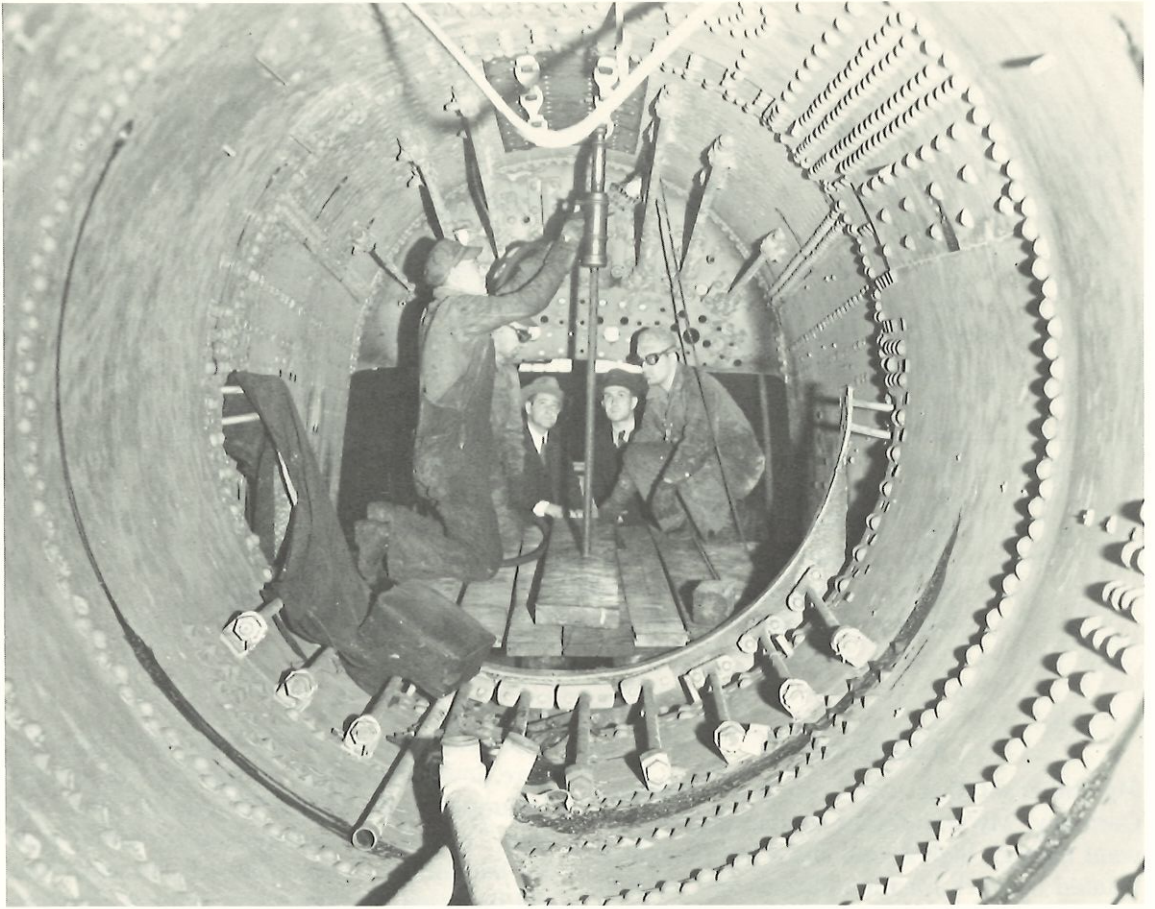
When I got my first car I was living at 714 West Market Street. We had an old Maxwell. It had straps to hold the top down and had running boards on it. It had the great big high wheels on it. We were going to get one of those Stanley Steamers but my father backed away from that. I think the next one we got was a Model T Ford. We had that and we had an old Essex. We had several old cars. At first we lived on Market and then at that time had moved out to West Washington on a little acreage there. We lived there about fifteen years then we moved back to town.

In 1919 I started off as a tool carrier. Normally you carry tools until a job opens up for a machinist or something. See I am a machinist. I carried tools for about 19 months. The Shop superintendent was a fellow by the name of Mike McGraw. The other kids were timid and they didn't want to go see him about it. I said, "I'm going to go see him about it." I said, "we are not going to carry tools any longer!" So I stopped him one morning and I said, "Mr.

McGraw, us boys we've been carrying tools here now for quite a few months—19 months for myself and we are still not on our time." He said, "You mean to tell me you've carried tools for that long?" I said, "Yes, sir!" He said, "You get the other boys and you come on down to the office." Which I did—there was four of us. So we did and he called up the superintendent—he was a big shot. So he told Mr. McGraw that he wanted him to put us boys on our time the next morning at 7 o'clock. So I would say that was the middle of February 1919. During that time we had to serve 1,180 days to become a journeyman machinist. We had a railroad strike in 1922. That strike lasted 3½ months. They had picket lines all around the shops, all around the country. As I say I lost 3½ months at that time, and see we were the junior apprentices, and of course every time there would be a layoff naturally we'd get laid off. Because we were junior men. So to make a long story short it took better than five years for us to come out and finish our apprenticeship . . . as a machinist apprentice.

Apprentice Training

You would get experience on a machine like a planer, a lathe, a drill press or the wheel lathe, and all kinds of machines you would run. Maybe you would be on the machine site for



Boilermakers drive rivets in a locomotive crown sheet, 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

three months, then they would put you on welding for three months. They had expert welders down there. Most of our decks and cross ties and a lot of stuff, instead of putting bolts in them, towards the last they would weld them. It would save a lot of time. Then they would put you up in the Air Brake Room on whistles, pops, bells, gauges and big brass bells. They had a lathe or two up there and then you would have to set the pops, yourself. The pops, the steam pops would open up at 203 pounds instead of 200 pounds. Some of the engines were set at 220 and 223 pounds. Then they would put you over on the floor side, building locomotives. You would be there for six months, because there was more to building a locomotive. Well, you would work with the machinist see, maybe two weeks with one machinist and the next two weeks they would give you another machinist and you'd find out how they worked together. You got more experience that way. Then they would put you in the Tool Room. There they would make

reamers, gauges, and blocks, anything that pertained to a toolmaker. You would have three months in there.

Then they would give you three months in the Roundhouse. When they dropped a pair of wheels down there you'd have to take the rods off and drop the wheels down in the pit and roll them out. Not only wheels but just any thing that had to be done out there. There were about sixteen different things. During the course of the four years when you came out of there if you paid attention and you were willing to learn you should have been a pretty good overall machinist. What they call a journeyman machinist.

1922 Strike

They went out for more money. And they wanted the eight-hour day. That's when the eight-hour day came into effect. You see, we worked ten hours a day. We struck for that and more pay. We got more pay, not too much more, but about a nickel more an hour. At that

time we had a union but it wasn't strong. They could put these men on if they had favorites, they could put them on these qualified special jobs if they wanted to, if they had a foreman that was a friend. If this friend wanted a certain job they could take a man off there and give this friend the job. Well, we stopped all this crazy stuff, you see. It was better and it ended up that everybody was more satisfied.

You know in the strike of 1922 they would back cars in the stock yards with scabs. What I mean by that, they were scabs, maybe they worked down here at Decatur or maybe they worked in Chicago and nobody knew who they were. Oh they were machinists, all right, or maybe boilermakers or carpenters or blacksmiths, and they would come in here and they would "scab on us." And it got so bad that they put up a barracks for them on the Shop property so they wouldn't have to leave the grounds at all. And when we came back from the strike of '22, I don't know whether they did it for meanness or not, but they would break machinery and stuff and it would have to be repaired and taken care of and it would take them a week to get things straightened up. You never saw such a mess in all your life! And they didn't care because they would get a week or two weeks pay and then they would go somewhere else and get another job. And that's what made it bad.

Safety

We had safety meetings. We had 60 machinist apprentices there at one time, that would amount to 300 machinists you see. They were allowed one apprentice to every five machinists. We had safety meetings that were on our own time. The apprentice instructor would be up there and he would point out different conditions and then he would take us all down there. Maybe he would walk over to a lathe or a shaper or a wheel lathe or something and show us what could happen if we weren't careful. We all had to wear our goggles. We all had heavy gloves, where needed. The only accident I ever had happened in the summer-time. We used to chip glue in driving boxes that sit on journals and go up on the locomotive on the wheels. These boxes weighed in the neighborhood of 150-200 pounds. Well, it slipped out of my hands and it dropped on my big toe.

So of course they picked me up and took me out to the doctor. The doctor had to take the nail out and dress it. I was home for about a week. Oh that hurt!

So they let me go back to work. They gave me a keg to sit on and I was turning plugs. Brass plugs—tapered plugs. You see, they didn't like these lost-time accidents—that spoiled their record. And they would get you back to work as soon as they could. That's the only time I was ever laid up for anything and that was serious enough.

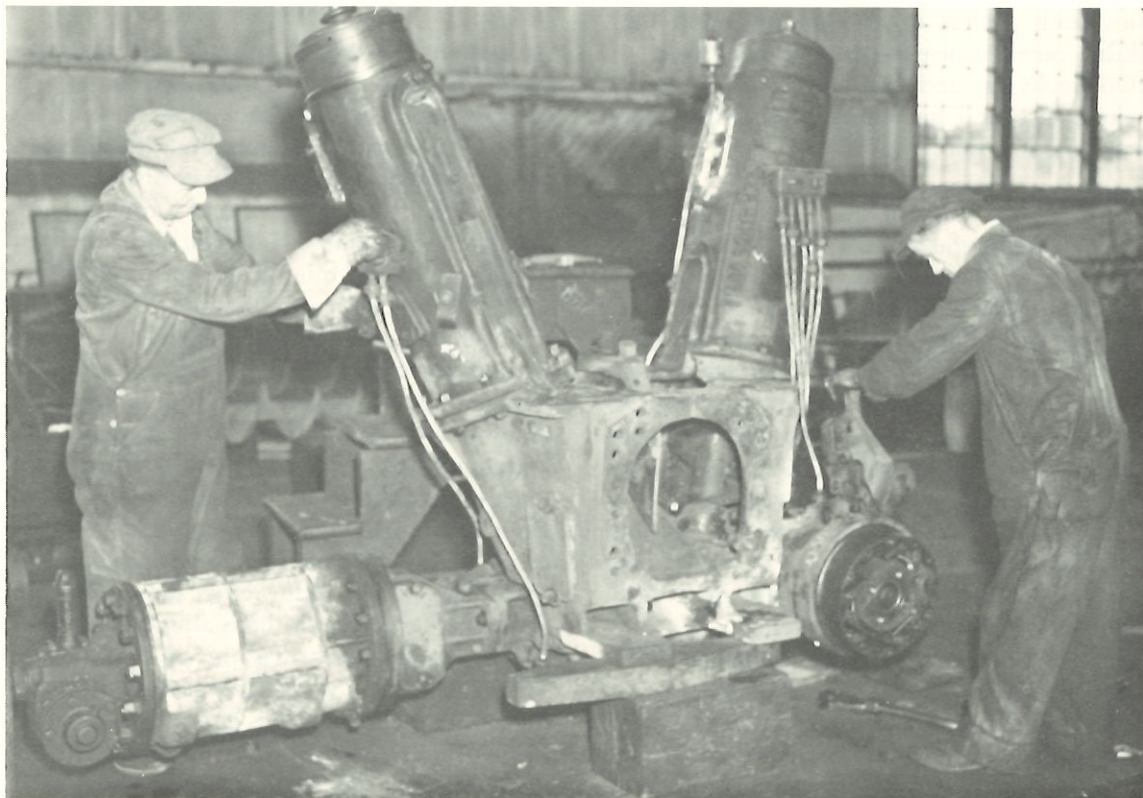
We had a safety committee. Whatever condition that existed, somebody would report to the safety committee and he would take it up with the management and say, "men are doing something out there that's not safe and we want to have that corrected." They would have a meeting every so often and they would have these things wrote up and they would try and correct them, which they did. The company was good, see. Because they didn't want to have any more accidents than what was necessary. The company took all the precautions and they were good.

Working

At that time it was a railroad rule that you would have to leave the railroad for a year and then you could go back there and if they were hiring machinists, then they would give you preference over anybody else. So I wasn't really laid off because we had a roundhouse. We had a roundhouse foreman, and I had just gotten out of my time in the spring of about 1924. The roundhouse foreman knew I was out of my time and he said there was a machinist that wants to take two weeks vacation at South Joliet. He asked me if I wanted to fill that vacancy. I accepted. As it turned out I ended up there about two months. When I got back they told me they needed a machinist at Roodhouse. So I went out there and I wasn't out there too long and I came back and I went to Venice. That's right across the river from St. Louis. I was down there about two weeks and came back and I was put on the roster in January of 1926. I worked as a machinist in the Shops here—Locomotive Shops. We had lots of layoffs then. I would get laid off and then go back again and get laid off again—that's why it took me five years to serve my time. Normally it takes four years.

Twice I went to Caterpillar. I worked over there at Caterpillar a month, and that goes against your record when you quit, you know. I had a nice job over there, I was on a lathe, but I wanted to save my seniority with the railroad and I told my boss that I was going to quit and go back to the railroad. He said that he was sorry but if that was what I wanted to do—so I went back over there again. And they rehired me. Then I went to Powerton, that's the big power station south of Peoria—in turbine overhaul. In the summertime when they tear those turbines down and overhaul them. At that time they had four turbines over there. They would take two one year and the next year they would take the other two. I worked there and I worked out at Eureka-Williams when they were making ice machines out there. So in between times it came out all right. I always got work. But some of those places didn't pay as much as the railroad did and that's the reason I always went back to the railroad. When I first went out there to Eureka, all they paid was 50¢ an hour. Of course, that's way back when—the money went a lot farther than it goes now.

As time went on I accumulated a little seniority and I worked a little steadier. We used to have a spot system. They would bring a locomotive in and we had 28 tracks in the big shop down there. The big shop down there, by the way, is still there. The railroad doesn't use it any more, it's farmed out for different things. Anyway, a locomotive would come in there and they would strip it down, take everything off of it, all the rods, wheels, and jackets and all the safety apparatus, the bell and the horn and the gauges and everything. They would go to all the different shops to be overhauled. Then we would move it up two pits and we would have an inspector there. He would go over the engine and see what the engine needed. He would write it up and make a report on it. It was completely stripped then and then they would move it up two more pits and start rebuilding the engine. We did all that crane work at night. I had a foreman there and we had a 150-ton crane that moved those engines up over the other engines. As I say we did most of that crane work at night because every time they moved an engine out from the aisle all the men would have to get out, just in



J. W. Lyda, helper, and Billy O'Connor, machinist, rework a coal stoker from a freight locomotive, September 1939. (Pantagraph photo)

case the cable or something would break, it would kill somebody. At night there wasn't as many men working as there was in the daytime.

Payday, Social Life & Railroad Days

It was kind of clannish. The Irish stuck together. We had a lot of them in the shop. A lot of Irish, Hungarians, Germans, and I call them Polacks. When they used to pay us they would pay us in cash. We used to always get paid on the 13th and 28th of the month. There would be a fellow come around and he had a big tray in front of him and a strap over his shoulders and a great big gun on his side. I guess he thought we were going to hold him up. Ha, ha. He had all the currency in there. Every payday morning he would start about 8:30 and it would take him all morning to pay off the different gangs. The foreman had a list of all the men and so did the timekeeper and he checked it off. Paper money was bigger in those days than it is now. They would pay you off in yellow bills.

And these Hungarians down there, sometimes they didn't like to take this regular money. They wanted the gold. There were several grocery stores on the West Side. One of them was owned by Tony Bonford (I believe) and he was a Hungarian. We would go over there at noon and get a sandwich or something and he would always say "Do you have \$20 yellowbacks?" I don't know why they wanted them but they did. They weren't any better than the other currency.

They had social organizations. They used to have dances down there. West of the Shops they had a hall there and anybody could go. They would have a big dance down there on Saturday nights. They served beer—no hard liquor, just beer. On the north side of the Shops they had the Hungarian Club. That is still in operation. I guess they have a membership of several hundred. They have fish fries, cookouts, in the summertime they have dances. But there is no railroad. Nobody works for the railroad anymore.

I wasn't a member of any of them. But you could go down. They all knew me. Before I was married and after I was married I took my wife down there. They used to be kind of clannish but they got away from that.

Then the Shops were opened up to the general public. Back in the late '30s we would

clean the shop all up and paint it and everything. We had stands and flags up and there must have been 15 to 20 thousand people go through. We all worked that night, and of course we all had clean overalls and clean uniforms on. People would go around and ask questions about locomotives and mechanics would tell them . . . and show them different things.

Supervisor's Job

In the early '40s they called me in the office and asked me if I wanted to accept a job as a foreman. So I accepted. I was a supervisor in the Locomotive Shop as a night machine foreman, I had 76 men under me. I had boiler-makers, blacksmiths and machine men. I was the general foreman at night and I had three foremen under me. In 1944 they had a coal strike all over the country. At the same time they were converting over to diesel power. They blamed it on the coal strike. I got laid off—we had about 1,500 men in the shop down there and most of them got laid off.

They called me in again and told me they had a supervisory job for me at Venice. They wanted me to go down on what was then called the Number Three, a passenger train, it was during the war—a long train with about twenty-two cars filled with servicemen. I would ride down there and a lot of times I couldn't get a seat, so I would go back where we had two of those 2,000 pound horsepower diesels, and I would go back in the back one where no one was in the cab and go to sleep and they would call me when we'd get down to Alton. They told me that I would only be down there two years, and I was married at the time, and I told them that I wasn't going to move my family down there. As it turned out I was down there fourteen years. I was down there from September of 1944 to December of 1958.

I would commute back and forth every week. I had the highest paid job down there. I was away from home and I worked nights, it didn't make any difference to me whether I worked night or day . . . as long as I worked, because I had a family to support. I would go and get cleaned up and I would go to the Union Station and catch Number Two, at that time get there at 9 o'clock in the morning, and my wife would be waiting for me down there

at the site of Beich's about quarter 'till twelve. That was Sunday noon and I would be here the rest of Sunday and Monday and up to Tuesday night. I'd go down on Number Three, leave here at 7 o'clock, and I'd work Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The general chairman called me and told me they had a supervisory job that was going to open up here in Bloomington the first of December. So I took the job and came back to Bloomington the first of December. I worked here on the second shift in the Engine House from December 1958 until July 1, 1973; I retired, see. I never got hurt or injured and I always had pretty good men working under me. I treated them good and they liked me.

A lot of times they would call for engines and they weren't ready, but I would go in there with them—they used to run these banana trains from Mobile. They would run them up to Venice, and they would have to be iced, you see about sixty cars. That train would go all the way to Kansas City, then it would go out to the West Coast. And they would all have to be iced you know, and they would break that train up into three or four pieces and the colored fellow would have to get in there and put those big blocks of ice in there—whatever it took—maybe some of them didn't have to be iced. One night there we ran three engines on that job and we only had two engines for it. The dispatcher said, "I have Mobile on the phone and they want to know when this train is going to leave Venice." It was about 2 o'clock in the morning and I said, "I'll make the engine by 4 o'clock." So I took all the men I had to put on that engine and I even helped them. We got the engine out, in fact it left a little before 4 o'clock. But you run into things like that, and if you have the good will of the men they will work with you, where if you are an ole crab or if you done a few things to hurt them they just sit back and take their time and take it easy and then it all falls back on the supervisor.

I belonged to two unions. I belonged to the International Association of Machinists and have a fifty-year card. Then I belonged to the American Railroad Association Supervisors. You have to belong to them, you know, or be a scab. And we paid our dues. At that time, I think when I quit, with the Machinists the dues were about \$5.00, but of course they are more now.

I didn't carry an office. But Mr. Belz did and if I had a grievance, or any of the supervisors, we would call him and tell him. Maybe they were going to work me overtime on my day off or something like that and I didn't want to work and he would stop it. And different things would come up, but I didn't have to call him too often.

As I told you I worked all over the system. Sometimes exciting things happened, you know. I had an engine come in the Roundhouse one night, and—of course you are not familiar with steam engines—but there was a main rod, come in there one night and it was red hot. I didn't want to take a chance on it because when a piece of machinery or iron is that hot it crystalizes. So I called the general foreman up and he said, "Ray, I've had those before—take the fire hose and put the fire hose on it." Boy, you ought to have seen the cloud of steam that came up from that thing—and it did it for an hour.

Railroad Today

Now they don't even hire machinists' apprentices anymore. Just handymen. It's a shock! The railroads just don't care. The first railroad I worked for was the old Chicago and Alton, in 1919, and in two years it went bankrupt, and when they reconsolidated they named it the Alton. We went under the Alton for a number of years and then the B & O (Baltimore and Ohio) took us over. Then the GM & O, that was the best of all to work for. Then this last outfit—Illinois Central Gulf owns it. And they have literally shut this railroad down. They got all the shop buildings torn down except the little Engine House. You know how many machinists they got down there now? They've got one machinist!

One machinist, and they do most of their work in Chicago. I was just talking to McGraw and he said they laid off one hundred of the office help. They have nobody down there and they have everything tore down—down at Venice . . . and the St. Louis diesel pit. They did away with all the buildings and they have tore them down. Most of their trains are re-routed through Champaign and Urbana, what they call their main line. The only thing we got running here anymore is—we've got one through train that comes out of Chicago and we got the locals. We got two locals in and out of Bloomington every day. And of course our



W. E. Diesel (right) poses with cylinders from B&O 50, during a shopping in 1937.
(Pantagraph photo)

passenger trains, that is the only thing we got. I can remember years ago when we had twelve passenger trains each way out of Chicago and St. Louis. Just think of it! In Kansas City we had eight and we had locomotives and cars out of Kansas City. Illinois Central just wiped out the Gulf Mobile.

It's the consolidation, you know. And I know the railroads have been hard hit but they are coming back now. I see the car loadings in the paper, in the Tribune the other day, where the car loadings have increased eighteen percent over the last three months. They weren't making what they should have made during the Depression but they were getting by. I don't know, the Illinois Central Gulf Industries has ruined this railroad. They set up for piggybacks down here. That was a pretty good thing here. The neighbors complained about those big trucks down west of the tracks there. There were a lot of children in the neighbor-

hood there and they were afraid one of them might get hit. So they rerouted them around and they had a pretty good piggyback business but that is all gone. I don't know what they did with that.

Well anyway, as I say, that's the way it turned out. And they gave a party for us out here at the Ramada. Tom McGraw, Belz, myself and another supervisor. That was in 1973 and I've been retired from the railroad well, it's going on eleven years. I have no regrets. I don't have to worry about anything. I have three daughters and a boy. My daughters live here in the area and the boy is a salesman—he's on the road most of the time. He's stationed in St. Louis. I was just talking to him this morning. I have a lot of leaves around here—I don't get to rake them much anymore; I am getting too damned old! I said to my boy, "When are you coming up to rake my leaves?" He said, "Well, I'll be through there Wednesday." I said, "I suppose you'll get up here about 9 o'clock at night so you won't get to rake them." Ha, ha.

So I worked at every point in the railroad. I worked in Chicago, they got a Roundhouse out there, and Glen. They've got one at South Joliet. I worked here in Bloomington and I worked in Springfield and Kansas City, every place on the system. When I was on the extra board that's what you had to do. So I had the night gang there with 76 men and we were going along there pretty good, I liked that job! Then they come along and say they are going to shut you down. But when something like that happens you are out of a job.

Well, there was lots of things that happened but you know, in time your memory kind of gets away from you. I was there 54 years and it was enjoyable—it was a good life. I get a good pension—I get \$1,000 a month . . . from my Railroad Retirement and then I have other securities that I can depend on. As I say, it don't cost me a \$1,000 a month to live. I own this place and I own another place on Monroe Street. I'm not rich but I don't have to worry about anything.

Interviewer: Mary A. Dossett

Ralph L. Fisher

Ralph Fisher was born in Bloomington in 1900, completing the fourth grade at Bent School, and starting in the Shops in 1917, working until 1969.

Like many shop workers, Fisher had little formal education, but soon mastered the intricacies of a difficult craft.

Until the 1960s, the pride of the railroad was its passenger trains. The Chicago and Alton was famous for its "Red Trains," trimmed with gold striping and lettering, and with ornate wood and later metal interiors. In the 1930s newer, lightweight streamlined trains were acquired, but the traditional colors and reputation of the railroad were maintained.

Ralph Fisher was responsible for the intricate pinstriping and lettering that graced these famous cars, and spent much of his employment preparing huge stencils for the cars.

His interview reveals a very thorough, sometimes stubborn personality, with a strong pride in his craft, and a dedication to hard work, done with a strong degree of personal commitment.

Growing Up

I went to school here in Bloomington, to the old Hawthorne School which is now the Bent School. I believe I went there until the fourth grade. I felt I didn't need an education. I went right to work. I worked at a nursery for awhile. It was Augustine's Nursery. We used to walk out there and we got seventy-five cents a day. That was located out at the north end of Normal at that time.

It was the west end of Main Street. They have so much new stuff there I can't hardly tell you. It was probably about a mile north of Willow Street. That is the best I could describe it. We worked there for two years and I worked at a meat market. That was on South Allin Street. I worked as a messenger boy at the postal telegraph company. I don't know how long I was there. That was when you didn't get much.

There were a lot of groceries around. You could start a grocery. Nowadays, if you try to start one you have to get a permit and you have to pay so much. We bought groceries at several places. You generally picked a store and stayed with it because it was the credit form. You would buy this stuff, and then pay-

day you would pay them so much and then go on. And then they got out of that and you had to have the cash.

Out here it would be all Swedes. Years ago the Swedes came here for mining at the Bloomington mine. They came here and started to settle out here. They were all miners. Then everybody started coming out here.

They were just here and there, wherever they could buy a house. I'll tell you what it is, the majority of people had to buy an old, used house. They couldn't buy a new one like they do today. There wasn't that much money. It would take you a lifetime to buy a house. You would have to take an old house and fix it up. Well, that is what we did here. We took an old house and we started working on it. When you got a few dollars you would use it the best you could. Nowadays, people buy a new house. Money is more plentiful. The majority of people didn't have too much money when you figured out through your whole life. When you're married it takes a whole lot more. You could work two jobs in order to have a little extra money. The union didn't want you to do that. Well, they didn't used to. When I was a young guy the unions didn't want you to make

extra money. If you got fifteen cents too much, they wanted that.

Working at the Shops

When I started working there were about 1,800 people. And then it went down and then it went up during the war period and then it went back down and it kept going down. They kept cutting every way they could.

We would go to work at 7 in the morning and work until 12 noon and go back at 1:00 and work until 4 p.m. for years. And then they finally got it in later years, they got it so that you would go home at 3:30 because you would take a half hour for dinner or lunch. We would work a lot of overtime. Sometimes we wouldn't even go home for lunch at all. We would stay there and work until 9 or 10 at night.

It was a dollar and eight cents a day. It was more than you got anywhere else. You would go to work for these other places and you weren't sure of your wages. When you went to work for the railroad your money was there every two weeks. A mechanic got ninety dollars and a dime every two weeks. Boy, that was a lot of money. An apprentice like me got a dollar and eight cents a day. Well, that was six dollars and forty-eight cents a week. And nothing taken out. You got it all.

I was living on West Empire Street. We would walk right through the tracks, you know, and jump the cars. A few years, I don't remember the date, but they stopped us fellows from going through there. They put a subway on Chestnut Street. They made everybody go through that. Or you could go to Seminary and go up through the tracks that way and go to the yards. But, you couldn't climb through the cars.

I worked three years and quit. I was gone about six months and I came back and when I was down by the Depot the master foreman was there. He told me to come down to see him. I didn't go down for two or three days. When I did go down they wanted me to go to work right away. They put me to work and the union threw me out. They wouldn't allow it. So, anyway, he told me to stay away two or three days and I will get you back down here so, he did, and I had to finish my time. That is the only way they would listen. I had to work for four years to get the trade. When I got it the general union representative took me into a car under directions of the boss and

talked to me for half of a day telling me to stay and get. He said when you got it nobody else can ever take it away from you. I did. In a few years they started hiring "McAdoo Mechanics" and the war broke out. They would set these "McAdoo Mechanics" up. They made them journeymen you know. They got the same money you did. In other words they learned from you. It got worse and worse as we went along. They cut things out to make pay out better. I had a hell of a time the last few years I was there.

William McAdoo

That was the man who was placed over the railroad during the World War. The United States Government did that. He was the guy who was looking after them. They didn't have the men in these places because they were taking them for war purposes. So, they were hiring anybody. They were called "McAdoo Mechanics." They would hire them today as a helper and hire them tomorrow as a mechanic. And the next day they would go on. That's where they got the "McAdoo Mechanic."

I worked fifty-two years. That wasn't all in one session. I quit twice. I quit once and then they quit me once. When it was getting close to our fulfillment of time. Whittington told Charlie House that we were going out of our time and that he would like to keep us and he said, "No, let them go away for awhile." So, anyway, you couldn't buy a job then. Whittington called me back to work. I went down and made out an application. Of course making out an application you were all new again.

I didn't do anything. Everything was down. I did anything I could. I would paint a house or two. That was when you could paint a house for seventy-five dollars and make money. Painting then was different. Everybody couldn't paint. Some of them didn't know how to mix it. At that time everything came unmixed. Then they started to get it in cans here and there and finally anybody could buy it. When you could go out and buy a can of paint and paint a room for five dollars. And then if they hired somebody to do it, it would cost them twenty-five or fifty dollars. When it first came out it came out in different forms. They put different stuff in it, like sour milk and rubber, to make it stay on. But, people would put that on their houses and it would ruin it. Floors and everything.



Final payday, July 13, 1922, during the Shopworkers' strike. (McLean County Historical Society)

I worked there (the Shops) for three years and then I quit. Then, I went back and finished my time and then I got out of it from that fall until the next spring and I got back and this fellow went through training with me. His name was Donald Tudor. They hired him as a helper for about six months and then they weren't going to hire him for much else, so he quit. He went up to Elgin and worked for the city up there. Somebody said he died but, I don't know. If you didn't have some kind of grind to pull you didn't stay. That was the early days of employment. Why they picked on me I don't know. Like one time I was laid off, I went up to my brother-in-law. He worked for the American Furnace Company. They were putting in a furnace someplace and I went up there to see some fellow named Sutton. I told him I would like to give him a figure on the theatre they were fixing up. He told me go ahead and so I went in and he told me that the architect would be here. Well, I didn't wait for him. So, I went there and summed it up and made him a price. He wanted to know something about who I was. Well, I never really paid too much attention and soon he told me that I could have the job. I thanked him for that and asked him when it would be permissible to start. This was when it was cold weather. He told me to use my own head

about that. Then I began thinking about how in the world I got that job that way.

Well, I had an uncle who was a minister in Normal. He went to his church. I worked for a month for this Sutton and he called me into the office and told me he had decided if I wanted to move up here he had some work I could do for him. He told me he couldn't give me work all the time but, that I could come in and do his work between. He told me he had a garage with no lights in it or anything, but that I could use it free of charge to put my ladders and work materials in. Well, I got to talking to some people and they said to be careful because if Sutton got me under his thumb, I would be working all night. Well, the first thing you know, you might be in debt with those kinds of people. Well, after I finished that job and I did his store for him, the people of the town started raising the devil. They lived there and wanted some of the work. We were living out on 413 Normal Avenue and he sent a fellow down from up there and said he had some work for me to do. Well, my wife told him "No, you can't pay for what you got, so you can't get any more." They didn't think anything of driving that distance.

1922 Strike

We struck. I was off for three months and two

weeks. We came back to work. We lost the strike and we had to come back to work. The boss put a bunch of us out painting the windows around because they didn't have anything for us to do and it started to rain. I went to him because the others were afraid to. So, I went to him and told him it was raining. I said that if it rained our paint would wash off. Well, they made us paint them in the rain. He was ornery that way. But, he turned out to be one of the best fellows we had. He did more for me than any of them. J. H. Whittington. He was the master painter.

National Guard Encampment

I went over there and some fellows come along that hadn't eaten for a week or something. I went over and they wanted me to go over and get some extra eats for them. Well, I went over there. They lived in barracks on the grounds. Well, anyway, they had big pans of baked beans and bread that they would bake. The bread was about an inch thick. You would take two of them and put beans between them. I got about eight or ten of them and I took it back and gave it to the guys who needed to eat. A fellow came over and told us that he had to go to Washington D. C. to be court-martialed for telling us things he wasn't supposed to tell us.

There was a woman or a fellow that got shot in the heel. Well, they would get the machine guns going onto the ground. We didn't think too much of it then because if they were going to get you they were going to get you. I don't know too much about that stuff. We were young and we didn't care about that stuff. My eyes water quite a bit. They are weak. I am getting pretty old.

Depression

You see there was no money. This fellow came to me and said, there was a hog and corn trade. They would put three stamps on this scrip money. When you got rid of it another person would put a three cent stamp on it, and when it redeemed itself it was worth a dollar. There were stores and gas stations and doctors that took them. I got two or three farms to do it down south and I needed somebody to help me. I asked a fellow I knew, Frank Shifflet, to go with me and he said yes. We would take turns with our cars and we would go down and pay for a room or two and we would get that

scrip money. I got a house down on Main, close to an alley, to be painted for scrip money. I couldn't do it because I didn't have time so I asked Steve if he wanted it and he said yes.

It was nice that I had work like that because I needed it. I adopted a little girl in the worst part of the Depression. Anyway, there was a lawyer here in town and I told him what I was going to do. He said that he wasn't getting any business because of the hard times during the Depression and that he would do the job five dollars cheaper than anyone else. Well, I told him, "You've got the job, bud." They wanted so much money and I got it cheaper. This lawyer had to go over to the judge and get it settled. There was no money, no pensions. It was hard times. That was really something in those days.

We went to movies and to dances. When the Depression came on in between 1930 and 1940 we had to work around the house. We had a bunch of people come over and we would play cards. Some of them would do that on Saturday nights and then we would have a dinner. We would play bridge and I don't know what all. And that is the way we would occupy our time.

Accidents and Hassles

I fell in one of these cars, too. I tumbled down the hole and went down the chute and my head hit. There was a fellow by the last name of Cropple. Well, he saw me down there gasping for air and he went down there and pulled me out. It was a hopper car. They hauled grain and one thing and another. It was a large car and anyway, I am lucky I am here. I lost an ear then. I have an article or two about it.

And another thing, the wife's mother died. Well, I told them that. They had these cars there and they had to be striped. Well, we were going to the funeral hall and what happened but the boss came along and wanted me to go to work. I asked him, "What the hell is the matter with you, anyway?" He told me I couldn't do her any good. He told me I was better off to come and help us because we need you. I said, "Well, I will come in sometime today." Well, I went ahead and we did what we were supposed to do at the funeral hall. I went back down there and thought we could get it finished up, that I could help them out. I went down there and they wanted me to

work overtime. I said, "No." Well, what they did was held it until I got back. They held that car. I knew what went where, how it went, and everything about it. It just goes to show you.

They wanted to put something on the observation cars and it had to be done in St. Louis. The boss was going down to do it. Well, he had me make him some patterns so they could just stick it on there. He had me make these patterns so they could just stick it on there. He had me make these patterns and they had an awful time because they didn't know where to put them. When the boss came back he was mad. I told him, "Well, my God, I can't tell how to put them on there and where to do it." Anyway, I said, "Everything has a given point to it." He told me he wanted me to square it. All you can do is take the high point and the low point. I told him how it was supposed to be done and they still had a devil of a time.

Working on Passenger Trains

This was more special work. Like the Red Train that would come, that was their Blue Train in later years. It would come in every eleventh month and they would redo it, in and outside. It had to be perfect, you know. They would work you overtime to get those trains out. And when you would get them out you would go back to old stuff. That was their crack time at that time. I can't really remember, but it seems to me at one time that they had over 250 coaches. We had so many trains on this line we even had them running to Kansas City to St. Louis. We had a couple of trains running from Springfield to Peoria. And Peoria to Dwight. All of them are done away with.

We did everything. We did varnishing of the interior of the cars. We varnished the outside of the cars and coated them. We did every kind of painting on cars. And then we would come down to sign work. We made a lot of signs. We made stencils finally. I worked in the Stencil Room for about fifteen years, I would say. Here I was, with a fourth grade education, and we had to make patterns and stencils. I had a perfect job. I took myself a dictionary so that I could spell. I got by.

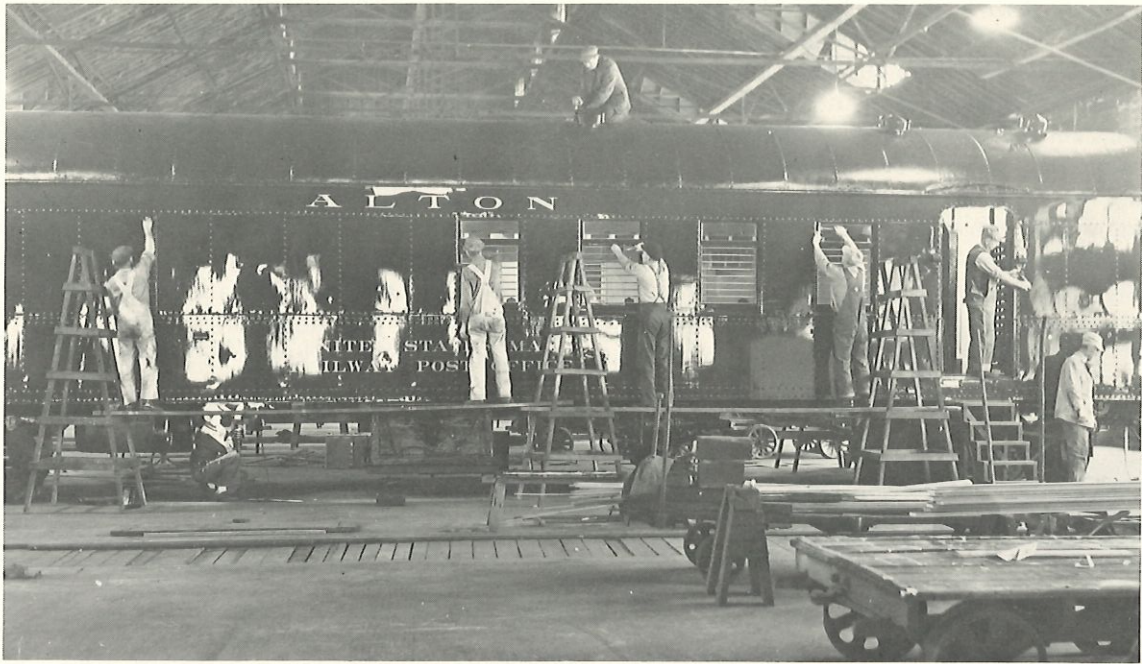
I worked on engines over there way back when. We worked on engines over there for a good many years. We worked in the shop where the boilermakers were and you couldn't

hear yourself think in there. They would send you over to the Roundhouse and I got hurt over there one time. I was working on an engine and some kind of tester blew off and hit me in the heel. It is a wonder it didn't break my leg or foot, but it didn't. But, stuff like that. Every guy would come up and say, "Let me in there for just a minute to work and you could have it." If you let him in there you were crazy, because you would never get back.

Whittington called me up to his office and said, "The spraying is here and we are going to have to do it because they are doing it all over, and if you don't take the job I'll have to lay you off." I told him he couldn't do that because I just got married, and he told me, "Go ahead and take it and if there is anything I can get for you or show you just tell me and I will do it." They gave me anything I wanted because they figured I could do it quicker than anyone. I didn't know it until I quit, but Charlie House told everyone that I was one of the best sprayers they ever had. And he was superintendent. He was a bigshot. That made me a good foundation. Anyway, I had a lot of ups and downs on the railroad. But, I got a lot of good work. We would work on the inside of the coaches. When a coach would come in we would strip it. What I mean is that we would take the doors, the windows, the seats out, everything. When it was renovated and we started putting those things back in, it was just like brand new. When the cars got together they would put two painters in there to sweep it out and paint the floor. Two men would spend a half a day working on it. We would stencil it and it would go out. When it got washed and everything, then it would go out and another one would come in. They would putty it and coat it. They used to use flat paint. When the cars got varnished and enameled, the varnish would peel off. It wouldn't stick.

Stenciling

You would have a guide for it and you would make it on your stencil paper and then you would cut it out. Then you would put it up wherever it went. You would take a brush and put paint on it and stencil it on there. It penetrates through those openings and makes the letters. There is some stuff I have down in the basement. There are letters and things we used to use. They were all mine and I kept them.



Painters varnish a mail car, November 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

You would have a little of everything. You would have to make circles, anything that would come along. For example, you would have to make a star that would be so big.

When the World's Fair was in Chicago in 1933 and 1934, we made all kinds of lettering for the Fair for things that were going on down there. We would work in the shop for eight hours and then after eight hours, we would work overtime. We made these lettering things with white background and black letters. They were about inch letters and we did that free-handed. We would letter there until 11 and 12 o'clock at night.

I guess they were advertisements and such things. There was a lot of work to those things.

I worked steady, that is all. I wasn't one to lay off. Even if you got laid off for a half of a day it didn't seem like much out, but it seemed like a barrel of money. The boss always said that if he could do without you a day or two he could do without you all the time.

It is true the way he had it figured. If there was anyone who wanted to lay off you might as well get rid of them because they wanted you there every day. They kept me doing everything. Why, I was running around the shop and when I got a little older, I was running up and down the road. Just everything. Even troubleshooting. I had the store foreman take me up to Chicago the first or two

times to get me broke in and then I was on my own. They trusted me. They got the light-weight cars ready to go and they wanted me to go with them in case there was anything to touch up or do. I told the fellow in the Stockroom to fix me up a little bit of paint for the different cars. He took gallon buckets because we didn't have anything else. There were about twenty cases of paint. When we got up to Chicago, the general foreman said, "My God, what did you go and do with all that paint?" I told him there wasn't much there. You have to have just a little. Well, he raised the devil. I never will forget that.

The last few years there I knew everything. I knew every crack and corner around the place. I knew what to look for and I knew where to go and so on. All these others didn't. The boss would take me and force me to teach all these guys. I told them no. That wasn't my job. I said that was their job. I told them if they wanted to give me a little bit extra, but they said they couldn't do that. There was a fellow down there that worked on freight and he was there when I first went there and his name was Carl. He was German. Anyway, he told me they could take care of me by giving me an hour extra a day and it would be taken care of very easily. They were going to give me an hour and then they said they weren't allowed to do it. Well, then, I am not going to show them

because it isn't my job. I said I don't think I should. We did a lot of fighting about that. There was a foreman out there and he told me to come with him over the tracks where the cars run and stuff. We weren't allowed on there, but we went over there. He was showing me a car and he said, "Well, I want you to know how you could do that." I told him when he got the time and the blue prints, you bring them to me and I will show you. He told me, "How would you put that in there? We got to change that." I said, "Whenever it gets to be the time we will have to take the measure-

ments and make it, that is all." I started to walk away and he said to come back, he wasn't through with me yet. When I started to make it Carl came up there. I told him, "I may have to cut the big bars down just a little bit." He said, "No, let's not do that." I told him that it would look better. Anyway, he stuck his nose in and he snapped one line a half inch off and that made it an inch off. I took his word for it and I went ahead and made the pattern and it didn't fit. He said, "That doesn't fit too well," and I told him, "No, not when you do that."

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte



Preparing a car for repair and painting, 1934 (Pantagraph photo)

Frank Swibaker

It was common for railroad shop workers, not only in Bloomington, but throughout the nation, to "hit the road" after finishing their apprenticeship. The term "journeyman" had a literal meaning, and it was expected that workers would refine their training by working under different railroads and supervisors.

Frank Swibaker, born in Garrett, Indiana in 1892, fits this pattern. His father worked for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at their shops there, and Frank completed his apprenticeship in that railroad town. Hearing about openings in Bloomington, he came here and stayed, putting down roots with the "South Hill Dutch."

The most fascinating part of Frank's story is his after-hours job as a banjo player in the Big Band era, playing with many of the most famous and popular dance bands of Bloomington, and describing the active nightlife of dancing, theater and vaudeville then available.

Childhood

I was born in Garrett, Indiana, that's a railroad town about 150 miles east out of Chicago, it's a railroad town, on the Baltimore & Ohio railroad. I have been working on the railroad ever since. My mother and father were born in Germany. I would have to say Strausburg. It's a little village off of Strausberg, Germany. My father's name was Fritz Swibaker and my mother's name was Catherine Swibaker.

My father worked in the shops all his life, like I did. He was—what did they call—he worked on railroad tanks. You know what a tank is on a railroad, the steam engine? A water tank, you know, that's hooked on the engine? Well, he worked on them and he would be changing, they had bad wheels. You know, on the tank, he had to change the wheels, springs—put in new springs and couplers, and things like that. That was his line of work.

I had a brother that was a machinist down at the railroad shop, John. He was my oldest brother. And I had another brother, he was a brakeman on the B & O, his name was James

Swibaker. And that's about all my family that worked on the railroad.

I ran around with a lot of Irish kids when I was young. I used to go to school with them, play with them, sing with them, played ball with them, and everything else. I liked to sing in a barbershop quartet, that was a lot of fun for me.

Moving to Bloomington

Well, it was kind of an accidental thing. An old buddy that I used to know, worked here in Bloomington and he came through my town of Garrett, Indiana, after I was through with my trade, see, I had already learned my trade. And he said, "Would you like to come to work in Bloomington?" He says, "I'll guarantee you a job." His name is Bobby Cole, a friend of mine, and he asked me to go with him back when he moved back to Bloomington, and I did. I quit my job on the B & O and came to the Chicago & Alton railroad. And that's how I happened to come here. That ole buddy of mine. Yes, I got a job right away. Them days on the railroad you could



C&A Pipefitters, 1930. (McLean County Historical Society)

get a job almost anytime. Back in them days, you know.

When I first come here the mechanics' wages were 35¢ an hour, and that was a mechanic—that wasn't a helper or a sweeper, that was 35¢ an hour and that was top wages and that was considering the building trades uptown, too. The sheet metal workers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, made 35¢ an hour in 1912. Don't hardly seem possible does it?

The people I worked with, they were all good fellows you know—they were easy to get along with, they were good people.

In the Pipe Department we made water pipes, steam pipes, air pipes on the locomotives. And you used to have to bend them to fit the engine, like if you had to make a pipe for an injector from the boiler to the injector you used to have to make that pipe, see. And air pipes consisted of air brakes, you know, on an engine. Every engine had air brakes and had a lot of pipes connected with it. He had to fit all them pipes. And the sheet metal part was the jacket that goes on the boiler engine, made out of sheet metal. We used to call it a jacket, a jacket for an engine and they would fit the

boiler of an engine. Did you ever see that engine at Miller Park?

That's a steam engine, and they used to put asbestos on the boilers and then cover them with a sheet metal and that's where the sheet metal part came in—and asbestos—it used to come in slabs about 2 in. thick and about 4 ft. long and about 8 in. wide and they used to put that, piece by piece, around the boiler and they had little hangers—they put wires around them first—and then put little hangers in there that would hold them pieces together like on the engine until you got your sheet metal and covered it. Covered the asbestos with the sheet metal.

It would be the men you're working with. That would be my fondest memories. The men you're working with. You were working with the best kind. We always got along well together and that was my fondest memories, in getting along with my fellow workmen.

I lived fifty years over on 313 East Baker Street. Fifty years in one house. That was located down this way about five or six blocks, you know where Lincoln Street is down there? Just one block east of Lincoln Street. That

would be in the location right close to the old Fans Field baseball park and I lived about four blocks from Tick's scrapyard, in that neighborhood—what they called a South Hill Dutch. In the olden days we used to call the South Hill Dutch. German. Whenever you mentioned Dutch that means German.

Union

We had a strong Union. The Sheet Metal Workers they called it—a load of pipe fitters and the sheet metal workers and both of them trades were together, if you know what I mean. They was in the same Union. They belonged to the same Union. The sheet metal workers and the pipe fitters, in the same Union. I've got a Sheet Metal Workers receipt in here I think—if I can get it out of there. There's the receipt, there's a number of—the local number right now is 352.

I pay dues but not as much as a regular journeyman. A journeyman is a man that works. But when you're on pension you don't pay quite as much, not even half as much, like you can see how much I pay. You pay every six months and it will be \$7.50, I believe that's what it says, every six months.

There was no trouble at all. Them was good days and nobody had anything against the unions them days because they was all O.K. It's different now.

Well see, in them days unions were alright and they helped to get a little more money on the hour, a little more raise now and then, you know. You go in the office and debate about a raise and you would most of the time get it.

Socialism

Socialism—it was a political organization and they had a man from the Socialist ticket for a good many years—they never got no place.

Debs. That name is familiar—I don't quite remember if his name was Debs or not. Anyway he was on the Socialist ticket. At that time it was a political organization, they were more on the union side, you know, and I don't know—they never got no place in America. No place. Socialists. Although there was some—a lot of people voted for them—I never did. The American people had no faith in the Socialist Party. They never voted for them, I know I never did and most of the American people never had no faith in a Socialist government. It wouldn't be what they wanted.

That's about the size of it. No faith. You didn't get no place. They ran for five or six years, then they finally dropped out of the running altogether.

World War I & the German Community

All the Germans were hard workers and most of them were more on the mechanical side. You know, they knew how to do things. They were quite intelligent I would say, a class of people. My mother and father came from Germany.

I remember during the War when we got a raise to 60¢ an hour. And we thought that was the greatest thing that ever was. Just think, we were making a penny a minute during the First World War. The war was during 1917 and 1918 as you remember.

There was quite a bit of people didn't like the Germans simply because you was fighting Germany. That would be natural you know. They never bothered me but some of the fellows that talked German down there and they had to tell them to cut out the German talk and talk English or we'll put you out of here. There was quite a bit of that—in both wars, World War I and II, for that matter you know. No violence. No. A lot of criticizing and things like that.

I can remember one time before World War I they had a German festival and that everything was rosy, everybody felt well of the Germans and them wars is what turned a lot of people against German people. Wars. World War I, World War II. But they don't seem to hold a grudge. Now they don't think anything about it. Just like nobody holds a grudge against the Japanese, do they? And now they're going to pay the Japanese I guess—you read it in the paper—so many million dollars. They put them in a camp or a prison, like a prisoners' camp, you know, they hated the Japanese during the war, the Second World War and they hated them so badly that they put so many in these camps you know, like prisoners, and now they are trying to pay it back to them. And the American people, they don't hate the Japs now. They kinda like them.

Depression

Yes. I was laid off during the Depression in the early '30s, five years at one time I was laid off, during the Depression. That was the worst Depression we ever had. I was laid off five

years and I was married and had about four kids at that time. We used to pick up odd jobs here and there. Some of them jobs would be playing in bands, the banjo. Other jobs would be odd jobs doing this and that. Painting—you know, things to make a little money. We never had any Social Security then. No pension either. That was my worst memories of all of my time on the railroad, being out of work in the Thirties during the Depression. You can put that down if you want.

Seemed like I didn't worry about that Depression, for some reason or another. We had a house, on collateral, and we put that house up to the grocery and that's how we got our groceries, you know. And that's the way it stood till I went back to work in 1936 or 1937 I believe it was, 1936, that's when I went back to work. We paid it off in monthly payments, until we got it back. And we owned the house.

Dance Bands

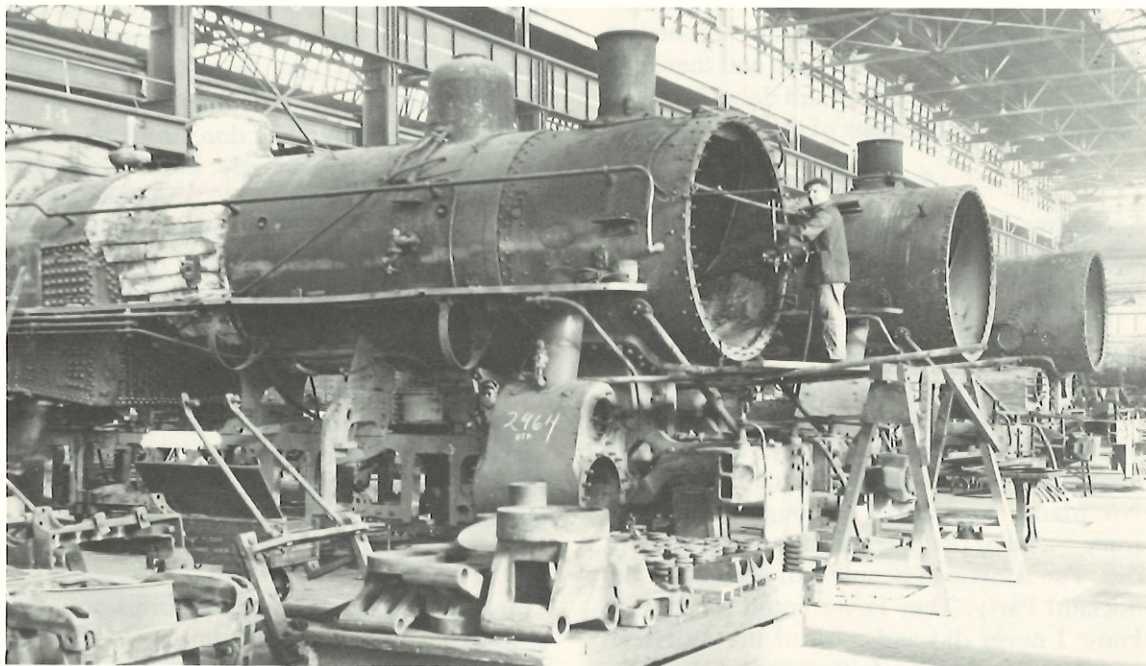
Before I started in an orchestra, I played in a dance band for about thirty-five years, a banjo player, in a dance band. That was during the time of the good bands, you remember the big bands, not country and western, they were all popular music. And in them days I can remember, the early days of the '30s, '40s, and '50s, they had a lot of outside pavilions. Every little town around here, you mention it, and

they had a dance hall, outdoors. Not all of them, but they had them in buildings too, but that was the thing them days. You see, we called it the thing them days because every little town had a dance hall outside. It may be in a little park, or some little place like that you know, that was the thing them days. Of course in the summertime; in the wintertime you could play inside, of course, in a dance hall.

I could mention half a dozen. But the first one I played with was the most popular and the best band I ever played with was George Goforth, and he called it the Black and Gold Band on account of the tuxedos were black and your instruments were gold, that's how they happened to call it the Black and Gold. But he was the main king of the dances them days here in the town. He had all the good dances like country clubs. He played a lot of jobs in Peoria, Decatur, Springfield, most everywhere.

You play at night, you see, I mean you didn't play every night, like you only played on Saturday and Sundays, and sometimes during the week. I worked at the railroad—and you only played at night you see. Your dancing would be all at night—night time. And it wasn't too tough, you know. Playing in a dance band was more fun than it was work, you know. It was just like taking money from home.

This was where we traveled with the dance



Boilermaker installing new flues, November 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

band. Peoria, Springfield, Decatur, and towns like that. We never went a very far distance. Later on George Goforth did. Later he wanted me to go with him to Miami Beach. He had a contract to play there one season and I had to quit his band on account of that. He got another banjo player and I had to pick up with other bands, dance bands. That's when I had to quit, when he went to Florida. Miami Beach, Florida. But he stayed there one or two seasons, I don't remember—it wasn't too long, but he came back to Bloomington. Later on his health failed and he had to quit running a band. I can name you other bands if you want me . . . I could name you five or six that I played with. I played in the band thirty-five years but they wasn't always the same band. Different ones—you know.

Dee and Albe had a dance band. Bill Timmerman had a good dance band. Chris Jackson, he was the last fellow that I played with. Chris Jackson. Chris Jackson and his High Hatters. The last dance band I played with. Them were the good old days. I am sorry that you didn't know where the Coliseum was. Do you remember the Coliseum or did you ever hear about it?

It used to be one of the main dance halls in Bloomington. The Coliseum. It's torn down. They use to have big bands there too and dances many—almost every night there would be a dance band playing down at the Coliseum. In them days there was always some place to dance. Either Houghton's Lake, the Coliseum and dance halls uptown, upstairs you know. Red Men's Hall, and different organizations had a dance floor. They gave dances many, many times.

Coliseum

It was an extra big building and they use to have all kinds of automobile shows there. You know what I mean—displaying big automobiles. And that was in the days when there wasn't too many automobiles and they even had the horse shows there, you know. A big animal horse show—and they used to roller skate there, too, in different times. when they were dancing, they were roller skating. It was kinda of a fun building you know, where you could have entertainment, roller skating, dancing. Things like that. I think the Coliseum was

on Front and Roosevelt Avenue if I am not mistaken. Down in that neighborhood somewhere. Front Street and Roosevelt Avenue, in that neighborhood and it was a beautiful place to have entertainment.

Guy Lombardo was one of them and what was his name?—Ben Bernie. And Tom Tucker. And Jan Garber. He played at Funk's Grove and Houghton's Lake. They use to call it Bongo Park before they closed it down.

They had more places to go for the young people than they do now. There was always something to do. You could dance, or you could go to the Majestic Theatre or the Chatterton Theatre down on Market Street. The Majestic Theatre was vaudeville, see, and that run every night, they had a vaudeville show every night. At the Chatterton Theatre they use to have drama shows, regular theatre you know. Companies would travel from one town to another putting on different plays, shows you know. Like minstrel shows—they don't have those any more. Did you ever hear of a minstrel show?

They were all singers in a chorus, see, and they had an end man on each end of that chorus and sometimes during the show they would make all kinds of jokes, different things, this, that and the other. They were all blackface, they weren't Negroes, but they were made up with—what would you call it—some kind of paste they used to put on and it was all fixed in a negro fashion, but the end man was dressed up a little bit more fancier, you know. They were very entertaining—that minstrel show. They had good dancing on the second half of the minstrel show. The first half would be mostly singing and the second half would be entertainment of all kinds, different dances you know. Buck-and-wing dances.

Social Life

Where did I go to church? I went to St. Mary's for fifty years. Still go, but I send my envelopes there, but I don't go now of course, I'm crippled up with arthritis in the knees. I walk with a cane, it's too much walking.

I belonged to the Musicians' Union and at one time I belonged to the Knights of Columbus, when I was young. Of course the Knights of Columbus is not a union, it's just an organization.

American Legion

I used to go to American Legion dances there. We used to have quite a few dances and they still do on Saturday night. But, down at the Canteen, me and my buddy, Mr. Timmerman, used to play down at the Canteen; was you ever in the American Legion? Well, they've got a place down at the American Legion, they call it the Canteen and it's where they have the eats and the drinks. The dancing was always upstairs on the second and third floor at the American Legion.

That's when I was a very young man. I was a baseball player, too. Not in the big leagues. I was the catcher. Them days a catcher had a damn great big glove and you couldn't catch them one hand like these guys do nowadays. They had a damn catching glove and you had to put your hand—the second that ball hit your glove you had to close or it would pop out on you. That's the reason why I got that thing. They have better equipment now, and the fielder's gloves and the catching gloves and the baseball bats and everything is better.

Changing Times

Did Bloomington change? No, not until it built the shopping centers, East Bloomington shopping centers and K-Mart and them kind—then Bloomington changed terrible. Most of the businesses went out to the shopping centers. This was a beautiful town when I come here. One of the best towns for this size you ever wanted to live in. Beautiful town. Everybody was happy. Everybody was working. There wasn't an empty building upstairs or no place. After the shopping centers—the malls is what I

am referring to, and they not only changed Bloomington, they changed almost every town around here. Peoria, Springfield, Champaign, Decatur, even St. Louis. I can remember about eight years ago, I went to St. Louis one time, me and a fellow went on a railroad train, we had a pass. We walked down the streets in St. Louis and I'll swear every other building in St. Louis was for sale and for rent. Even in St. Louis at that time. That was even before they built these malls out here. It was close to it at that time though. I don't remember exactly.

It caused a lot of—I think them shopping malls caused a lot of trouble, not only in Bloomington, but other towns as well and that's including these little towns like LeRoy, Heyworth, Danvers, Wapella, El Paso—you name it and them little towns, most of them. I was talking to a fellow from LeRoy the other day. He lives in here. He said in LeRoy there's not too much to it any more. About everybody buys their stuff at the mall.

As the world changes, things change and something else comes along like bowling alleys and night clubs, things like they are building up on the mall and the east side. Night clubs and bowling alleys and they have dancing, too, but I don't go. But they had that entertainment in town but now there's hardly nothing here now. What ruined vaudeville was talking movies. That's what ruined vaudeville. And it ruined a lot of theatres. Millions and millions of theatres. And now television is ruining your movies. And that's the way it goes down the line. Things change all the time.

Interviewer: Mike Mulberry

Joseph C. Fellenz Sr.

Joe Fellenz Sr. came to Bloomington in 1903 at the age of 11, via Ellis Island. His story exemplifies that of Bloomington's German Hungarians, who came in family groups before World War I, each family paving the way for the next to follow.

Joe was born on July 17, 1892, in what is now Romania. He passed through the portals of Ellis Island not once, but twice, having been sent back to his home village in 1907, at age 15, to learn the tailoring trade. His wife Anna emigrated to Bloomington from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1913, and they were married in 1915.

The German Hungarians mostly settled in "Forty Acres," the area immediately west of the Shops, and in 1919 established the Hungarian Club, of which Joe Fellenz was a charter member. Joe's nephew, Nick Petri, is also interviewed in this book, and the Petri family helped the Fellenz family make the trip to America.

While in the shops, Joe spent most of his working life operating cranes, unloading cinders near the Roundhouse and lifting thousands of pounds of locomotive in the Back Shop. Joe first started working in the Shops in 1914 and retired in 1962.

Coming to Bloomington—Childhood

There were some people that they (Fellenz's parents) knew before they came over here and they wrote letters back and forth; they helped us to come over here. They lived right over on the corner of Morris Avenue and Empire Street. They knew that we were coming but didn't know when. They were glad that we came. We came in 1903 and they came here about 1901 or so.

I remember we came on the train one early morning and we walked all the way from the Illinois Central Station all the way here; I was eleven years old. We asked people on the way which way to go and finally we found the place. Out here there was mostly German, Hungarian and Irish.

I spoke German and Hungarian at that time, you learned to read and write them. I went to St. Mary's School. At that time they were teaching German and English. I knew how to read and write German, so I got broke into

English pretty quick. I don't have much education, but I was the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) financial secretary for 23 years; I was able to do that. I used to work up town when I was a kid, before I started working in the Shops. I used to work as an errand boy for Klemm's.

Starting Work

I started there 'long about 1913 or '14. In 1915, I got married and moved to Chicago. Then I came back and started work in the railroad shops again in 1918 and I stayed on that job until I retired.

I just went over there and talked with the supervisor. I told him what I wanted. I started to learn the boilermaker, and I didn't like that. I just thought I'd like it, but I didn't. I was always small; then I went to work as a machinist's helper. I worked as a machinist's helper, worked at that for several years. Then I quit and we moved to Chicago; I worked for Inter-



Crane operators and supervisors, Joe Fellenz, Sr., far left. (Joe Fellenz, Jr.)

national Harvester, the last time that I was up there. Then, I worked as a candymaker's helper for the Boston Store. At International Harvester, I would thread the shafts for binders at the point where the bearings go on. The binders are machines the farmers use. I only worked there a year; I didn't stay very long the first time I was there either, about a year. Then we moved back. I came back in 1918 and got a job back into the railroad shop. I wanted to work as a machinist's helper, like I did before. Mr. McGraw, the general foreman, said no job was open now but a crane job. He called that foreman over to talk to me and I walked home and I had a job. I worked at that until I retired. I started on May 20, 1918, and I retired in February, 1962.

I started to work on the cranes in 1918, World War I was on then. Work was steady. Work was steady in World War II, also. I worked on through. A lot of people working the Shops, there was 1,700 people working the Shops in them days. In a few hours they showed me how to operate it and told me to

go ahead and try to run it myself; that's the only way you learn.

There used to be a coal chute out here, coal to fill up the coal cars. I had a big scoop on the crane, a cinder hoist, like a big clam shell, and I'd get the cinders out, I'd scoop them out and put them in a car. Whenever the coal chute was bad, I got the coal and put it on the engine coal tanker. I had to transfer that stuff. It was a good job. Sometimes they'd work you pretty hard, sometimes they didn't.

Mugsy McGraw was a general foreman in the Back Shop. He's the one that talked me into getting the crane service. He was good to me. When he told me that he didn't have a job for me where I wanted, he asked me if I wanted a job on the crane. Then he took the crane foreman out and talked to him to see what he'd say. Then, he took me on. He was Irish. Then, Mike Riley was the crane foreman. Riley was another Irishman.

There used to be a coal chute over here, you could sit there and see the coal chute and then on the north end of it was the runway for the

crane and the boss, Mike Riley, used to come up on the crane to me and sit in the cage. There was a little grocery store over here. Mike would give me a quarter and a dime to go buy some apples. I went down and got some apples and we would sit up there and eat them.

I had a 1919 Buick and Mike Riley wanted to borrow my car. I didn't mind if he borrowed it, but I didn't want him to ruin it. He said he guaranteed he would not ruin it. He said he would wash the car and then go and see his girlfriend and then take it back. He did just that.

I always used to get up at 6 a.m. I had to be at work from 7:00-3:30, eight hours, and we had a half-hour for lunch. At first, we used to have an hour for lunch, but they changed it later to a half-hour. I lived over on 1210 West Walnut Street. I used to come across the tracks and it took me only seven or eight minutes to walk back. It didn't take me too long to eat. You're on the crane by yourself, nobody to talk to. I only had a half-hour on lunch and never knew what to say. I never got to talk except at lunch and then I only had time to eat!

The Best Job?

The best job? I had the best job! Whenever there was lifting to do, there was a lift I could use. I had a seat to sit in. If I had some work to do like cleaning cups, etc. I went and filled them up with grease. I kept everything greased such as bearings, that kept the cranes running. If I didn't have anything to do, there was a seat where I could sit down. My son was on the switch engine. He started out as a fireman and at the end, was an engineer. He ran the engine on the first day that he worked as a fireman.

There were several jobs that I wouldn't want to do. Cleaning engines with oily rags and wiping them until they shined. That kind of job I didn't like because it was too dirty. The only time that I got dirty was when I was working on something greasy that I was repairing, which wasn't too often.

There were a lot of people who got hurt, got their eyes hurt by something that chipped and flew through the air. That's why they made them wear goggles to protect their eyes when they were chipping something. I saw people injured in the shop.

Union Membership and the 1922 Strike

I started in 1918, joining the Union. It was only \$2.00 a month and then we got the insurance. It was \$1,000 at first. We had members from St. Louis, Chicago and Springfield and Kansas City. They all belonged to our local #685.

I collected dues from everybody and gave receipts back to them. I had to keep my books balanced and sent in the receipted dues to the International office and all that. Keep the money deposited. We paid for the policy, but the value of it now is \$1,600. It's a life policy.

We had on Labor Day a parade, and we used to get in on them. We would meet up town and walk all the way out to Miller Park. They had happening out there. Every day on Labor Day. We walked. There was other floats but we all walked in a group. We usually had quite a few, at least 15 or 20 from our bunch alone. A lot of our members were outside, from Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Springfield or wherever they had workers, but they all belonged to our local.

Every once and awhile we had someone from the International office give a little talk. They would tell us what certain things were coming up or what we could expect from different things. They would come and tell us about raises and not to overdo it. You got to know how to talk. All the mechanics, they got about the same wage. The helpers had wages which were a little less, and the apprentices were less yet and so on. You can better yourself when you work a little longer there, like a machinist, every year he gets a little raise automatically.

Whenever there was something wrong, they (the Union) always went into the office and talked to them to correct it. They were always good for that. The Union had a chairman. Whenever there was a complaint, they would tell him and he went in to follow up. They always help us when we was in trouble, like a strike or something. They always come and help from the International office.

1922

Sure, I was in it. Not too much. I went picketing a little bit down by the railroad to watch that nobody goes to work. In those days, it wasn't strict like now. You could go anyplace nights and nobody would bother you. Now

you're afraid to go out on the streets. We stuck pretty good together, as far as union men were concerned. When we was on a picket line, we would change, alternate.

Strike Assistance

We got some, a few dollars a week, as long as it lasted. At that time, everything was cheap. And we weren't out too long, at least. After they settled it, two or three of the oldest guys got called back first. I was the second oldest. They needed crane operators so we got called back as soon as they settled. We got in earlier before the rest of them, so I didn't lose too much. We just didn't get the raise like we wanted.

Strikebreakers

We tamed one of them and he got to be a good union man and we took him in. He came from the East someplace, and we talked and talked to him and he came to some of our meetings and ended up being a pretty good fellow; he became a good union man.

The Depression

Yes, we worked. There was seven crane operators and only three of them was supposed to work . . . the cinder hoist and two in the Back Shop. Instead of laying them off, we divided the work, let some work three days a week. We kept doing that for quite awhile until we got tired of it; we decided none of us was making very much money so we decided to quit it. We just had to tell the other fellers that us three older guys wanted our job altogether so each one could making a living. So I was called a name for doing it and the others too, but I didn't say nothing. So we got our jobs back. I had two kids, still going to school. The boy was born in 1920 and the girl, 19 months later.

I'll tell you, in 1932, I was making about \$18 and some cents for a three-week check. I went and bought two hogs for the \$18, that's cheap you know . . . three cents a pound out at the stock yards. The man who sold them to me wanted a few cents more for these, but he says, "just give me your check and you can have them." Butchered them; got 600 pounds for two of them. I lived on Walnut Street, just a block from here. I had that house built there; then I sold it and bought a lot here and had this built.

End of Steam—Dieselization

They had to change the shop altogether. They had to get all the machines in and out and start on the diesels. That was altogether different work. Instead of having them big wheels going, they just had trucks, they just pull them out and they set them on a different track where they repair them and the same way with the engines. We lift them out and set them on track space where we can work on them. Or else, they can take them and put them on the railroad car and ship them wherever they want to get them fixed. Whatever the company wants to do. They worked on the shop.

It did seem kind of funny to get rid of those steam engines. They just burn them in pieces and put them in a car and sell them by the ton to the foundry or whoever wants to buy it.

When they had steam engines, they had them repaired every so often, when they had more men to work. They once had 1,700 people working in the Shops, and more than half of them were in the Machine Shops. Compared to what is now, there is hardly nobody there.

I lifted up several of them diesels, lift them like we did the steam engines. Same way, carried them to the track where they wanted it and set them on the track where they were working on it. They tell you to take the wheels out and set them on blocks like jacks. They would set on there until they get everything repaired. Most of the work was electrical stuff. There was still boilermakers, but that didn't amount to too much. Since the diesels come in they have more electricians. Our department. We got more electricians.

The one that I was running the crane in, the last when I retired, that used to be the old Machine Shop, built in the 1890s. That is where I finished up running the crane. I worked as the battery man when I was laid off from the crane. I repaired batteries for the diesels. I learned that after a while. I went back to the crane. I did that job in the 1940s. When they took all the work to start the diesels, everyone got laid off, that included me too. They only had one crane operator, I got the job to work on the batteries. I learned how to repair them and fix them, and install them in the diesels and the batteries for the passenger cars.

But I want to tell you something, that battery acid was a bad thing. You had to have so

much acid in there to hold the charge. I had an apprentice with me all the time, and we had to be awful careful. One time the apprentice was checking it and he got a light in there and it made a spark and come up and got him in the face. I took him by the hand and took over to the pit to wash the battery acid and got the hose and washed him off. I saved his eyes. You had to clean them batteries, and he got too close to the post and something live there and he touched that. He stood there and let me wash his eyes with the hose.

Retirement

Like you say, you don't see it and you miss it. I don't go outside that I don't look over there. I go out in the yard and I can see the shop over there. Every time I look over there just to see it. I drive over the Locust Street bridge and I got to look over there. That just comes automatically to me.

Hungarian Club and Bowling

I'm one of the only older ones left. In 1919, the American Hungarian Club was built, of which I am a charter member. It is bigger now than ever, with over 100 members.

They had parties, dances, stuff like that. Everything was cheap in them days, you know. Most of the work was done by the members. Now it is all different; it doesn't even look like the same building now that it has been rebuilt. It is about six or seven blocks north of here on Calhoun Street. We rebuilt it, different siding, changed the windows. We built on to the building, the whole length of the club is bigger. Another section has been added to the front of the place for storage, stock like beer, whiskey and different things.

We have sausage suppers twice a year, fish fries and we started something new last fall, an Oktoberfest. We had orders here from Springfield. On March 5 we have our anniver-

sary; actually it is in February, but, on account of the weather, we hold it on March 5. There will be a dance here then.

I was president for one year. Then I was secretary and collected dues for one year. Then other guys took it over.

I've always bowled. Just the last three years that I don't bowl. I belonged to three or four leagues. I bowled two, three times a week. The best I ever did was about 173 or so average. That was pretty good for me.

I bowled mostly at Circle Lanes. I used to bowl at the place over on Front Street Pat Harkins used to run. There were 12 or 14 alleys there where we played before Circle Lanes opened. They have car sales lots there now. Over by Wards, one block beyond that. They used to hold dances there at the Coliseum. They used to have all kinds of horse shows, big dances where I used to dance, roller skate and everything else.

Hand-Setting Pins

There is a trick to that. You have to clear the lane and set the pins in the rack and when you have them in the rack you set them down. Then you let the rack go up. They had boys who did that while you bowled until just 10 years ago when they got the automatic setter.

Hungarian Club Lanes

Just two lanes. At first, I was the only one who could keep score and after we broke them in, we had enough to play teams. Usually Thursday night is open night for all members. Now the members mostly go to Circle Lanes. One group still comes out on Sunday afternoon at 1:30 and plays one game. When that is through, the other group comes in. When I joined the club in 1919, I was a bowler then. I bowled in Chicago in 1917.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte

William B. Munro

Although only briefly employed in the Shops with summer jobs, William Munro knew the Shops intimately through his father, William A. Munro, who was the general erecting foreman in the Locomotive Shops in the early years of this century. From this important position his father supervised the rebuilding of steam locomotives, and through the elder gentleman the young man knew the Shops and the intricacies of the operation.

William B. Munro felt the impact of the railroad for the rest of his life as a downtown merchant, spending forty-eight years in the furniture business. His interview tells how important the payroll of the Chicago and Alton was to Bloomington, and the commercial enterprises on the West Side and Downtown that were sustained by the shopworkers.

Parent's Background

My father's name is William Alexander Munro. My grandfather on my mother's side was George Fowlie. He was an inspector on the railroad. They observed their 50th wedding anniversary in 1930. He came over from Scotland. Aberdeen, Scotland. My father came over—he learned his trade in Scotland. He was born near Banchory, Scotland. I've been over there, in fact, I went and saw the church where he was baptized, near Banchory. He learned his trade over there and his father was a station master on the railroad in Scotland, one of the Scottish railroads and his brother, Benjamin, worked for the railroad in Scotland. And his father was a station master. My grandfather's name on my father's side was William, too, but his name was William Munro.

My mother was born in Scotland. Her name was Fowlie. My father came over here in the '90s, in fact, he got his citizenship the 12th of October, 1896. I have been over there a couple of times. I have been pretty active around here myself. I've been active in the community for over fifty years now.

My Dad was the general erecting foreman, he had charge of supervision of the rebuilding and tearing down and rebuilding of the steam locomotives.

They all seemed to like him. They used to kid him a lot. He had sort of a Scotch brogue and they used to get a kick out of him as he would walk down toward these engines. Down at the shop they had engines that would be on pits. They had an overhead crane. As they tore down the engines, clear down, scaled down to rebuild it, as they progressed along, different crews would do different types of jobs on that engine and then they would move it to another pit. Till they got down clear to the end of the line, then they would take it out and give it a test run. That's what he had supervision on, you see.

He had supervision of a lot of young fellows coming in, learning their trade. They learned their trade under my Dad. He had supervision over them. They were thrifty and hard working. They seemed to learn well. I can remember Olie Wannemacher. I use to see him occasionally in his retirement years, and he always said this about my Dad. He said, "Your Dad always gave me a chance and gave me a break" and "he knew more about steam locomotives than anyone else that came into that shop." They all had a pretty good word for him. Even Olie Wannemacher. I can remember Glen Salmon, Alvin Callahan. A lot of these fellows that—Dewey Penn, that lives up there on Walnut

Street, he learned his trade under my Dad. In fact, he called me afterwards, said he forgot to tell about my Dad. My Dad walked down this row of engines where these men were working, around the machines and everything, and he always had some quick sayings that he would say. He would say "Whoop 'em up, you get hell, I get hell, we all get hell." Well, all the men knew him by then. A lot of fellows would come up to me afterwards, these young fellows that learned their trade, they were older than what I am now, then they would always kid me about it. That was one of his sayings, "whoop 'em up." They would call him "Whoop 'em up Bill". That's what they called him. A great number of the men. I can remember, too, that those yards were always filled with



William A. Munro, c. 1900 (William B. Munro)

freight cars, switchmen, doing a tremendous job down there keeping the trains moving all the time.

He was the one in charge of the repair of engines. You know, general erecting foreman. They say he had a marvelous memory. He could call out a pattern, and a material number just like that. He had it atop his head. He didn't have to look it up in his records. He used to get a kick out of these fellows, that would tell him, "Why you're a chip off the old block. I remember your Dad, Whoop 'em up Bill."

During World War I the government had taken over the railroads. My Dad became an inspector at that time of the engines and he had to travel. I know he used to go to Michigan, that was one of his areas, checking on the

running stock of the locomotives. I can always remember, I was probably about ten or twelve years old at the time, he always used to bring back big stalks of celery from Kalamazoo, Michigan. They used to raise a lot of celery in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I can always remember him coming home on a weekend, he would always have a big bunch of that celery. He was also an avid gardener. When we lived at 904 North Lee Street, he used to take some of the prizes for his well-groomed, well-kept garden.

I can remember when they had the mallet engines, the 701, they were huge locomotives and they used to take down to Lawndale Hill to help push up the long freight trains from that area. That's south of here in Lawndale. They used to use them to push with some times. Or used them on long, long trains.

Of course, during 1933, that's when the steam locomotives started to pass out of the picture. That year was when they started down here to cut up for scrap metal, oh, about 150 locomotives. Diesels were coming in then. That made quite a change. I think it took some of the glamour out of railroading because everybody seemed to be so much enthused and excited about seeing steam locomotives. I don't know. Just something about it. Every kid liked it and everybody else liked it.

Apprentices, back in those days, earlier than that, only got about 15¢ an hour. But the apprentices, after they learned their trade, they usually didn't continue on working for the same railroad. They were supposed to go out somewhere and get some experience. Now my uncle, my mother's brother, learned his trade under my Dad too. His name was George Fowlie too, just like his father. I remember him coming to our house with Raymond Roberts. Raymond Roberts had a stepfather who didn't get along with him too well. My grandmother and grandfather lived at 205 West Graham Street. My uncle George was the only one home, he learned his trade at the same time so my grandmother took Ray Roberts in and raised him. My uncle George, and I remember Ray Roberts, they both finished up their apprenticeship at the same time. They came to my Dad trying to get some ideas where they should go for six months' or a year's experience so they could come back and work here again. My uncle George never came back here. He

went to Chicago and became a millwright. He worked in Chicago. Ray Roberts came back to Bloomington and he married a Bloomington girl and he lived at 902 North Oak Street and had two daughters. It was for them to go out and get experience. That was a pattern, part of it at that time. To go out and try your wings someplace else. Then come back. I think after that, some of the apprentices did stay on. But early, early on the apprentices had to leave and get some experience somewhere else.

Childhood

Well, I can remember as a boy my Dad used to take me down there sometimes in the evening, 'cuz in those days they didn't have an eight-hour day, they had crews working at nights sometimes, putting in ten to twelve hours, particularly if they were rebuilding the steam locomotives. I would go down there at night with him after supper and he would walk me through and see if there was some work going on and of course, because of that, I got to know hundreds of railroad people through the years. We lived down on the West Side at that time and I was born and raised on North Madison Street, in the 900 block, that's where I was born, in the 900 block. We moved over to the corner of Chestnut and Mason Street a little later on, I was very small then. Then, I think when I was about five years old, my Dad bought a house on North Roosevelt Avenue, 903 North Roosevelt Avenue, and remodeled that house and we lived there until, I think, I was ten or twelve years old. Then he bought a lot at 904 North Lee Street, just right across from the old Hawthorne School, where the Bent School is located now, he built a house there about 65 years ago. We lived there until my father passed away.

I can remember taking rides on Sundays, and holidays. Of course my Dad had a pass and he would get on the steam locomotives, that is the trains, and ride down to Springfield and back, or up to Chicago and back. Many times he got me on the engine and that was quite a thrill to a boy at that time. I can remember Chestnut Street, on West Chestnut Street, was just packed with railroad men going to work every morning, between 6 and 7. They had to be at work at 7. There would be just hundreds of men going down through that way. At that time there were a lot of stores that

were depending on the railroad, in fact I worked at Rodgers Notion Store when I was going to school. All the time I was going to high school I opened that store between 5 and 5:30 in the morning, I would build a fire, kindle a fire in the coal stove, and in the notions store we had all kinds of things for railroad men; tobacco, scarves, cigarettes, gloves, railroad caps, overalls, trousers, sundry drugs, and just a general store.

That was one of the going stores, and then there was Rodgers Grocery Store at the corner of Mason and Chestnut Street which was in business for a good number of years. Every 13th and 28th, every two weeks the railroad people got paid. Well, railroad payday was a great thing, not only for the little stores down in that area but the downtown stores too. Right across from Rodgers at the corner of Chestnut and Mason, was Muhleisen and Ryan, a butcher shop, a neighbor, they were in business for a good many of years. Down further on the same side of the street was Haffner's Drug Store.

They cashed many of the railroad checks on the 13th and 28th. And across from that was Byrne's Barber Shop, it said "BYRNE", Eddie Byrne's barber shop, which was quite a place in those days. It was always a very busy barber shop. Further on down the street was the old C & A Hotel, for the railroad men. This was where they changed engine crews many times. The railroad men would stay here overnight and there was what they called the "Beanery" there. A place to eat for the railroad men. It was a very good place to eat. Then right behind that, not too far away from it, was the old C & A Library. They had a library there and all the railroad people could go in there, they could read library books and various kinds and get their library books.

I can also remember back when I was going to school, my Dad got me a job in the lumber yard there in the summer months. They had quite a big lumber yard then, and the fellows that worked in the lumber yard would unload the lumber and stack it in the lumber yard for drying purposes. Then I also worked part-time in that section. Just general labor work at that time, then out back in the lumber yard was a planing mill, they had their own planing mill.

They had the Car Shops, where they made the cars for the railroad, not only boxcars but



Bloomington Railroad Days, Handcar races, July 15, 1936. Winning C&A section crew, Eugene Lowery, James Rash, Robert Snell, George Gavola, Joe Bentisla, George Segobiano. (Pantagraph photo)

also the Pullman cars. They had a Paint Shop, some of the top paint jobs in the country—the old Red Train back in the early days before they had the Abraham Lincoln—drawn by steam locomotives, of course the Abraham Lincoln was eventually drawn by diesels, but Red Trains that used the 500 series of engines, were very fine trains between St. Louis and Chicago and they went on to Kansas City too. The railroads at that time had very, very big business and trucks weren't too much competition then. There were a great number of train crews out of this area. Hundreds of trainmen, conductors, brakemen, and engineers, firemen, and Peter Kane was the chief crew dispatcher at that time. I remember him very vividly and

the train crews that went out of here and the trains, my gosh, there was a train going out of here every half hour, one way or the other. Not only the North and South but the Western Division. The Western Division was a big operation in those days too.

Years ago they used to have to call the railroad crews. A lot of those railroad crews didn't have telephones, some of them did and a lot of them didn't but a lot of the phones were out of order and a friend of mine who was going to Wesleyan was calling engine crews at night from 3 to 11. I went with him that night to call engine crews, that night of the sleet storm.

He was a friend of mine and I used to go with him sometimes just to pass the time away

and be a companion to him and that one night I stayed practically all night because they were having problems getting crews and messages out. Because at that time there were a lot of trains running. That was the only way they could call the crews. See, the crews went out according to seniority and they had certain rights, either the southbound or the northbound. They were called according to that.

Impact of the Shops

I think the railroad people were generally all pretty good people. Sort of a melting pot. See, there were Germans, Irish, Scotch, and English, pretty much connected with the railroad down there and lots of them had come over from a foreign country. In fact, some of my father's good friends were English and Irish and German.

Then when I got to finish school I became credit manager of Kirkpatrick's Furniture Store on North Main Street, that's where Leath's is now. I became manager of Leath's, then I went up to Ensenberger's and I retired as vice-president of Ensenberger's Furniture Store. I was in the furniture business 48 years. But right along with the economy I can tell you when I was with Kirkpatrick's how important payday was. The 13th and 28th of every month. We had a lot of accounts receivable at Kirkpatrick's because of the railroad people. They all had accounts there. Every 13th and 28th they would come in and pay on their accounts. They were on credit in those days too. We never charged any carrying charges there so it made it pretty easy for the railroad people, they didn't have to pay any interest. But it had

a pretty big impact not only on the furniture business, but all the retail business downtown felt the impact of the railroad people. Of course, you had a different economy at that time. Everything was lower wages but everything was relative, too. The merchandise was a lot cheaper, too. But that had a good impact on the economy in this area.

It was a very reasonably priced place for the railroad people. You see, Roodhouse used to be quite a railroad center, too. Roodhouse, Illinois. And they had reasonable places where railroad men could stay overnight. And a place to eat. It was nothing fancy but the food was good. It was just a common ordinary place. They didn't want anything elaborate. Just the railroad men would go in there, and of course in those days a lot of them would be pretty dirty firing those coal engines. Even the engineer would get dirty up there in the cab. Pretty exciting to see all those trains going in and out of there. A lot of people would go down there at night sometimes and in the day, to watch the Red Train, they had what they called the Red Train before they had the Abraham Lincoln. Those coaches were all made here and painted here, and constructed here. Tremendous work that they did down here. They had good craftsmen. They were excellent. The painters were excellent.

Train travel—there weren't too many cars back in those days. If people wanted to go to remote places, quite a ways from here, they would have to use the train. A lot of traveling salesmen used the trains in those days too.

Interviewer: Michael Mulberry

Nellie A. "Babe" Daly

Born in 1888 at the corner of Scott and Lee Streets in Bloomington, Nellie Daly marked her roots as Irish, with her grandparents first emigrating to New York and her parents both making the trip to Bloomington.

Nellie's interview vividly describes how the neighborhood revolved around the Shops; the stores that lined Chestnut Street, the shared pain at an injury or death on the highly dangerous railroad, and the sharp divisions that union battles could cause.

Nellie's father started as a conductor on the railroad, eventually ending up at the Cabinet Shop, before he was disabled. Her brother Tom was a clerk at the Depot. Nellie herself put in many years at Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's School in Normal, working as a seamstress. Her vivid descriptions evoke both the hardships of domestic life at the turn of the century and the intense and close community that thrived on Bloomington's West Side.

Childhood

My mother was born in New York and her sister, who was three years older, was born in New York. I don't know what brought them here. My father was born in '48. The potato famine was in '46 or '47, around in there. My mother talked about County Mayo and my father talked about County Tipperary.

My father was born in Lockport, New York. My mother was born in Tarrytown, New York. My father came to Paris, Illinois when he was 18 years old to stay with an uncle. But he only stayed there a year. What brought him to Bloomington, I don't know. What brought my mother and her sister to Bloomington I don't know, but their aunt was dining room girl at the Davis estate.

At that time at the Davis place they had a coachman, they had a cook, and they had a parlor maid and an upstairs maid and a yard man. All kinds of help.

I don't know what brought him (her father) here. But he used to talk a lot about when he first came here. He was very friendly with a man by the name of Trite and he was in the

livery stable. Whether my father was just a friend of his or he worked there I don't know.

Childhood Chores

No television, radio, gas, electricity, and telephones. Several years we would go to the back of our yard, pert' near to the alley, was a little shanty . . . in the winter it was cold to go out there before you would go to bed. Pumped your water out in the yard. Carried the water in. And have your slop bucket that you had emptied the dish water in and carried that out. And the ashes that were in the stove, you wondered how people ever kept their houses half-way sanitary.

One of my chores was lighting the lamps and putting the kerosene into the lamps and trimming the wicks and getting it ready for the evening. That was my job. Of course we didn't have electricity, no water, no stores, no pavement out here, and the old coal stove that you filled with coal and carry out the ashes. You just don't know how people lived in those days. Washing in the kitchens in washtubs and

boilers on top of the stove to boil the clothes.

The cistern was out in the yard and you had to drag the water in. And the well. You had well water. We had a heating stove . . . for a kitchen stove, for our range. We started the fire with paper and wood and then had coal. My mother made bread and cakes and pies and everything you can think of and she would put her hand in the oven to see about the temperature. Ha! How she could tell the difference between a pie and bread . . . if the stove got a little bit more coal then you would let it die down a little bit.

Hobos

When we lived on the north end of town we had hobos every day. And I guess if you were out of work you just tramped around and begged until you got settled again. There was no such thing as any relief or anything to lean on. And we had hobos—oh there was hardly a day that we didn't have somebody come in from down the tracks. They would have hobo camps, right out north of Division.

Around the track, close to the track. And they would have their mulligan stew and sometimes they would ask for a couple of potatoes. My mother never turned them down. Well, there was one fellow that came one morning and I can remember him because my mother was so mad at him and when my

father came home he blew up. She had ham that we had had for breakfast and he wanted something to eat and she said that she would fix him a sandwich and she made a sandwich for him. Wrapped it up for him . . . she never let them eat at the house . . . my father didn't allow them to eat at the house. And he wasn't gone five minutes until he came back and handed her the sandwich and said, "What kind of stomach do you think I have, I want something to eat!" Ha ha!

He didn't want the ham sandwich. My father came home and my mother was still boiling and she told him about the ham sandwich and boy, that did it. "They never fed another tramp," he said, but she did. She said that she could tell if a fellow was really hungry. But if they were hungry, she fed them.

The Shops

There were several hundred people that worked over there. Oh, I guess close to a thousand. It was the biggest thing here; of course, there wasn't anything east of Main Stret, it was all farms.

He (her father) worked as a cabinet maker. Which was the cars, in the dining cars. They were very elaborate and fancy.

I can't remember much about that but I do know that when I was little, he had a little higher wages than the average man. And he



A West Side family, c. 1910. (McLean County Historical Society)

got \$1.75 per day. Can you imagine that?

I've been to that place (the Shops) many times with my father. It was a thrill. To see all the big machinery and the Paint Shop. There was a man named Callahan in charge of the Paint Shop. He used to go there a lot, I guess they were good friends. One thing I can remember, that struck me at the time was that it was always so HOT in there. And Mr. Callahan used to say that the varnish and the paints had to be warm.

Oh there were many different departments and shops there. Of course, the Roundhouse. Do you know what a Roundhouse is? The engines came in there, they came in on the track. Well, there was a pit where they dropped the cinders . . . the hot cinders, and they were on a turntable and they would turn the engines to go different directions. And then there was the Carpenter Shop, and the Car Shop, Paint Shop, Boiler Shop, Machine Shop, and all different departments.

I can remember a young couple that lived next door and he was a brakeman and they had "callers" sent out from the yard to call the men. You could hear them many times in the middle of the night calling "Frank" "Frank" and rapping on the window. "No. 80 North, 2:30. Are you awake? In the middle of the night and alert them that they were supposed to go to work. Of course, there was no telephones. I don't know of anybody that had a telephone. Not in this neighborhood.

Health & Safety

\$1.50 was your average pay but he (her father) got \$1.75 a day. And he worked there until he had an accident. And that was in 1913-14 -15, along in there. It was on a Sunday, they couldn't get the help that they needed or something and they called him in to the Machine Shop. It was in the Machine Shop and he went down there. And he fell and broke his legs and that was the end of his career. But his mind was keen until the day he died.

They didn't have the precautions that they have now. One accident that would happen often, was that when they would be coupling the cars together, the men had to go in between them to couple. And very often they were crushed or injured. That was quite common.

It was all family stuff. If anybody that belonged to the Shops got hurt, why everybody that worked there felt it . . . felt like it was part of the family. I recall so many that had only one leg or one arm or something that were hurt in the Shops. Of course, my father, he had both legs broken. There were so many accidents. I can remember my father saying, "Mary, I think I should go to work today, maybe they need help." "Yes," she would say, "Go on over and see if you can help the poor things." Ha! Now they wouldn't stay out long enough to go to your funeral.

As time went on things were improved. One thing that comes to my mind that didn't mean anything to me in those days was . . . the widows . . . well, there was a woman that lived across the street here and her husband was killed, she never worked and raised her children. There must have been some "back-up" pension or something. And there were several that had lifetime jobs and it seemed like that after they weren't able to work that they were still taken care of. Larry, he was the watchman. And at the south end was the tower and gates. Henry Mays was the towerman there for years and years. And they were both crippled. I think they had lifetime jobs there, so evidently it was the result of some accident.

There must have been some pension or something. There was a pension but my father wouldn't apply for it. My brother did.

He never tried. His idea was that he got paid for every hour that he ever worked and they don't owe me anything. It was his Irish pride!

1922 Strike

My brother belonged to the Clerks. I don't recall whether my father ever belonged or not. He was very much in favor of the unions but whether he ever belonged or not, I don't recall. He must have, though, because he used to go to meetings every once in a while.

There was a strike, in fact, earlier than that . . . in the '90s, my father was out on strike. There wasn't any unions or anything. I know it was terrible for them to be out of work and no money coming in.

My younger brother, the plumber, he had a very dear friend, they were babies together. They were almost like twins all their lives,

and he went in and my brother never had any use for him after that. He did everything under the sun to get back in my brother's good graces but he never made it. It was terrible to be a SCAB.

Neighborhood

Several blocks west of the tracks and several blocks east were all neat little homes of people who were connected in some way with the Shops. As time went on I can remember several of these people worked in the offices down at the Depot.

The Hotel, let's see, it was on the northeast corner and the Freight Office and the Library and the Yard Office was in a little nest there. Across the street was a restaurant, barber shop, and a grocery store. On the west side was a butcher shop, two grocery stores, in the block. And at the time, of course, the street went over the tracks.

There was O'Neil's down here on the corner of Lumber and Chestnut. He almost went broke, thousands of dollars on the books that he never got back. His reputation was that if you went in there and asked for something you got it, whether you were working or not. We went there, but as far as I know we paid. Maybe we would be short one month but we would make it up the next, and there were hundreds the same way. O'Neils seem to be outstanding in charity.

You could go out anytime, the day or night, you were never afraid. I recall before I went out to the Children's School I worked downtown at Wilcox's in the alteration department. That was on the northeast corner of Jefferson and Main. There was a Kresge's and a 5 & 10 in there after that. Anyhow, it was around Easter time and we were working late and I was on some special job. The lady who was in charge and I were there alone and the manager of the store, and he was supposed to watch the streetcar for me . . . and somehow or another it went by without him seeing it and I walked home. It was 11:00 o'clock at night and I walked home and not a bit afraid. Never even thought of any danger.

The Hungarians were kind of a clique when they came here. When they came here they were very much to themselves. The first I knew about the Hungarians, they were very thrifty and had nice little homes and kind of

dressed up everything, any neighborhood they came into. But they had a club, the Hungarian Club, but they were very much to themselves . . . but they got over that, too. And the other neighbors around here got into their Club and went to their dances and all that.

The machinists would have their annual dance and the carpenters will have theirs. That was once a year, you know. Of course, the police and firemen had theirs, that was a big thing.

Depression

There was soup kitchens. St. Joe's had a soup kitchen down here on Jackson, you know. And I suppose there were some around town, too. And there were a couple from this neighborhood used to go—men used to go out to the soup kitchens. One man up here in the next block used to go out—and wasn't ashamed to do it. He'd go out there every day, it kind of eased up the family, they could have more if he was eating at the soup kitchen.

Now O'Neil's grocery store, I don't know how they stayed on their feet, at all. Because they handed out groceries, regardless. And I suppose everybody was affected one way or the other. They had to be. There was a shortage of food. Flour. You couldn't hardly ever get white flour. You'd get some kind of mixture. And sugar and coffee . . . you had to skimp on everything, you couldn't throw an extra teaspoon of grounds in. You couldn't waste a grain of anything!

There were layoffs but our family was lucky, really. Because my brother was in the plumbing business and he had steady work, I don't remember him ever being laid off, maybe a day or something. And of course the other brother was at the Depot. He had a job. A lot of the fellows, especially the young fellows left town. They went to Chicago or even St. Louis looking for work. It was rough. When you look back you wonder how in the world you ever got through it! You watched every penny. It had to be an awful worry, emotionally, not to know how or if you would come out of it.

Children's School (ISSCS)

I went to the Children's School in '35. You're not interested in the Children's School. That



C&A Carmen's Picnic, Funk's Grove Green Bonnett Farm, July 27, 1922. (Nick Petri, Sr.)

was under civil service. Salary and maintenance. Stayed there and lived there. At that time my father was crippled, my mother, of course, was living. My other brother was working down at the Depot.

I took the streetcar and transferred downtown. It was terrible. And we were at the Children's School and many many many times, especially in bad weather, the streetcar would turn around and go back to Bloomington and we had to wait for another trip. You'd be afraid to go back to the main building for warmth, and then you would shiver. That was rough. I really enjoyed every minute I was out there, but getting back and forth got to be terrible.

C&A Library

That whole neighborhood there was like a little city. There was a hotel there, the Freight

Office and, let's see, the Library. And Maggie Fenton had charge of that and she also was crippled. I think that she didn't have a foot and she had a lifetime job.

This was quite a wonderful library, they had hundreds of volumes on everything, the C&A Library. And as I told you she was crippled. I think that she didn't have a foot and she had a lifetime job.

job there. I don't know what ever happened to the books, whether they turned them over to the city or what.

I can't remember her keeping any kind of books, you'd just tell Maggie that you were taking a book out and she'd say, "Okay, Honey." Ha, ha! That would be it. I don't remember having any library card.

Interviewer: Janice Turner

Joseph Dewey Penn Sr.

One of the best-known individuals at the Shops was Dewey Penn, who worked nights in the Roundhouse for most of his fifty years on the railroad.

Dewey was born in Bloomington in 1898, and lived his entire life on the East Side, residing in the same house his father built when he was a small child. His father worked in the Shops, and Dewey followed him, starting his apprenticeship in 1914.

From a family with long trade union roots, Dewey served for twenty years as chairman of Machinist Lodge 342, one of the largest and most influential labor organizations in the Shops. He was most proud of his gold fifty-year card from the Union, one of the few held, because he retained his union membership after the 1922 strike, when many workers dropped out.

His story revealed a character full of stories, beginning when his home on the East Side was the city's limit. Dewey took great pride in his skill as a machinist, and speaks highly of the steam locomotive—a romance that captured him and sustained him through fifty years of nights in the Roundhouse.

Childhood

I was born down on Beecher Street, but I don't know what number now. I always told 'em 408 or 410, I don't know, back of the barn. Used to be a little store down there, before you went down the alley on Beecher Street, down to Wilder Field. We moved over in here when I was four years old so I don't remember too much, only I remember 'em telling me I was born over on Beecher Street. Reason I remember that neck of the woods because I always went to the football games and baseball games at Wilder Field, the old Wilder Field you know, with wooden fences.

My grandparents came—from my father's side, the Penn side, came from England and then my mother's side came from Ireland. Joseph Michael was my father; by golly, I'll just have you put Margaret on my mother's—I don't remember her middle name. He (Penn's father) was a labor foreman in the Car Department.

Joe Penn lived here—Jack Penn lived at 907

East Chestnut and Charlie Penn lived at 912 East Locust Street. Three brothers and there was seven in our family, eight in Jack's family and five in Charles's family. That's the way it run across there. They used to call it Pennsville out there with the kids.

Just a block east of this street here was the city limits in them days. I'd go out on the other side of that and hunt rabbits. In that old pasture. There was a lot of rabbits over there. Up on Empire Street there was a lot of berries and apples and fruit and the rabbits. A-many times I'd come home from work and walk out there with just a club, snow about up to here, come home with two rabbits—clean 'em up, set 'em out and freeze 'em and next morning have 'em for breakfast.

They couldn't get away from you. Oh they could if you wasn't quick enough to smack 'em. Yeah, I'd go out there. Yeah, people from here to Main Street used—if you'd get in their back yard you'd see rabbits hangin' out—they

didn't have refrigerators, they froze 'em out there. We had 'em, we had a big long porch on the back here. My mother used to get up and have two of them rabbits all fried and home-made biscuits and gravy. By golly, when you got that in your belly you could walk up that side again' that west wind to the other side of town.

They used to say, over in Forty Acres, that anybody out of boundary of South Hill, if you was courtin' a girl and used to come out there they'd dunk you in the old horse tank. I used to hear that but I never come across any of it. We never had that here. Initiated 'em, you know, they used to call it. I told you we had a ball team, football and baseball—roller skated up at the old Coliseum. Never seen no difference—some people did but I never did and I never seen anybody that would want to pick a fight with any of the other kids. Hell, it seemed to me that it was like another link in the chain going in the sprocket all this time.

The Hungarian people that come in there too, you know—my dad had a lot of Hungarians workin' for him in the laborin' gang when they first come here. When the old Hungarian people come here, I heard my folks talkin' about it. The only ones I heard 'em talkin' about is the ones I worked for. Twelve times they would go together doing one house. Until they all twelve of 'em had a house. That's the way they built up the old Forty Acres. The Hungarians. Cause my dad, and I remember my dad would labor for 'em and they used to work nine to ten hours a day in them days—and seven days or six days a week and he'd let 'em take the tools home in a wheelbarrow—three wheeler wheelbarrow—and take the tools home and they'd work all day on a Sunday and twelve men on that house, and that's the way they built a house—until the twelve of 'em got their house built.

My uncle was a cigar maker and he had five kids workin' for him and when I was a kid I wanted to make them cigar rolls and I got to tastin' that tobacco and that's how I got to chewin' and everything. I didn't use tobacco until I was about twenty-one. Just didn't care for it. I didn't care for cigarettes and in them days you weren't allowed to smoke on the railroad over there around the Shops—everybody chewed tobacco and that's how I got to tobacco chewin' I guess.

Country Club Caddy

I never did play golf—I did when I was a kid 'cause I was caddy master out at the old nine hole. Used to make them golf clubs you know. Bought them from Spaulding and they was all wood shaft. I put a-many of them together and wrapped that stuff and put that fancy shaft in there and shellac lampblack. He wanted me to do the handle. Some people got big in there. Put a big pad under there to get that grip—I've done all that.

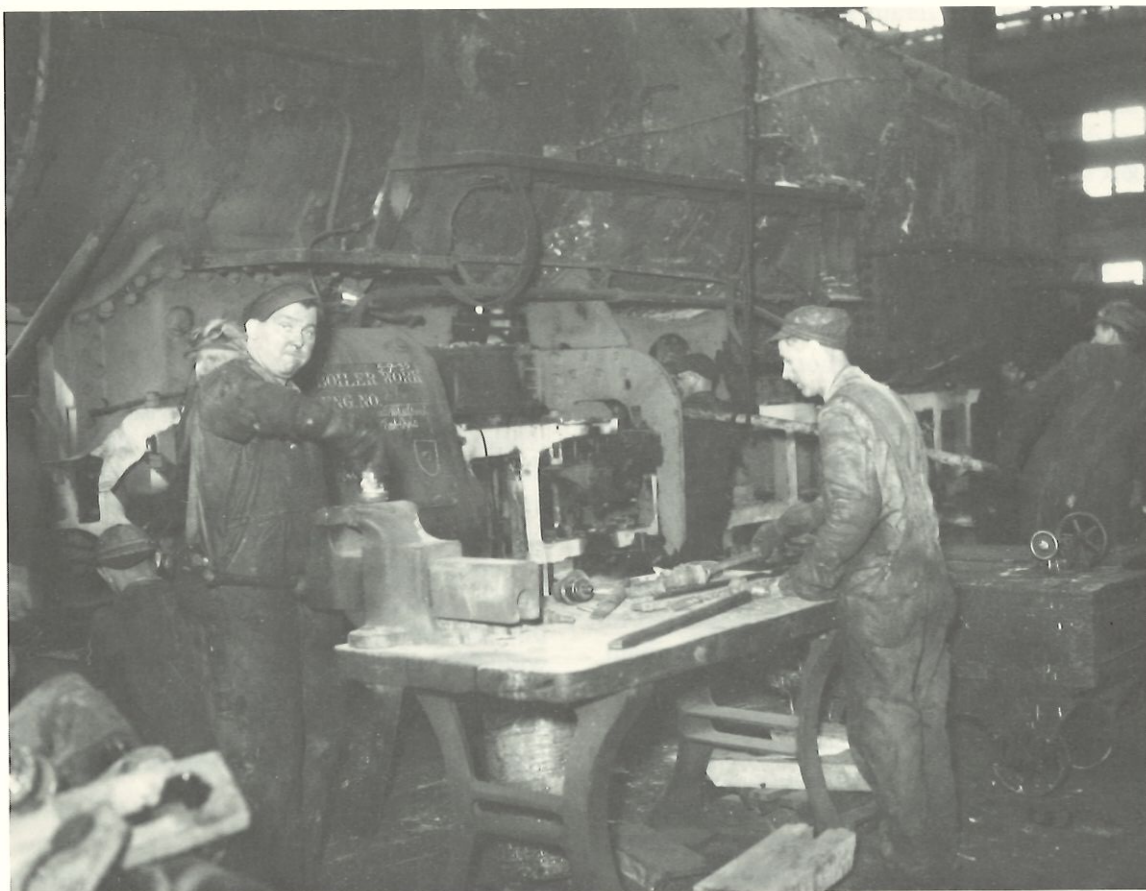
I was working for that Scotchman out there, I was supposed to be the caddy master and I worked with him and people left their clubs there and I'd have to shine 'em up at night, you know, wipe 'em all off. He learned me how to put the clubs all together and stuff like that. Like this grain, you know, shellac 'em off. Put 'em in lampblack and then rub 'em all down, put that on 'em and then rub 'em some more with that shellac. Golf clubs all come in the bulk you know—they wasn't together like they are today. You had to buy 'em from the pro right there. This old Scotchman, he learned me the business there.

Baseball

I played catcher. Gene Harrison, who lived over on Monroe and Towanda Avenue, his father was an engineer on the railroad and Gene was, when we was kids, played ball across the street there where Soper lived. Gene wound up being coach for Bloomington High School—Gene Harrison did. He had quite a record.

First Jobs

Now I been workin' since I'm fourteen years old and next month I'll be eighty-five. I've always had some kind of a job—wasn't big money or nothing but—some of the jobs I made pretty good money on. But I wasn't a very good saver, but I won't go hungry—I'll guarantee you that. You know where Miller's Hardware Store is uptown there? Across from the Post Office uptown there on Monroe. That hardware store over there—right up here on the railroad track is a—right off the route on Locust—there's a house on the corner and right back there that street on the west side of the railroad is Robinson Street, he had a grocery store there. He was a farmer boy from Heyworth and I drove a horse up there delivering



Ed Twoney and Guy Beeler grinding boiler checks. Behind them springs and hangers are being installed, using a lever suspended from the overhead crane. June 1935. (Pantagraph photo)

groceries for him when I was thirteen-fourteen years old. He got this old International truck—2 cylinder—air cooled, hard rubber tires, high-wheeled, lower wheels in the front—like a buggy, you know, and I drove it down to the farm, down to Heyworth to get butter, eggs, and chickens and bring 'em up to that store. Fifty cents a day. But it was worth a hundred dollars a day to me to drive that car at that age. Two cylinder.

First Car

I was about sixteen—a Model T Ford. I bought one for \$5.00. Sixteen, maybe pretty near seventeen. First old Model T. Oh we worked on 'em. My oldest brother used to buy these old cars and strip 'em down there in the back yard. That back yard is full of bolts back there, that high part—where we stripped cars. I'm going back now with World War—1914 when the war started in Germany. In 1914 he was buying them cars and old electric cars—the whole body was aluminum—sheet aluminum,

and a lot of the older cars had a lot of aluminum castings here and there. He stripped 'em down there.

Hell, he threw the bolts and stuff away. The iron. He bought here and there. Out in these small towns within a forty-mile radius around here. Buying cars and drive 'em in the dirt roads, you know, in those days with no tires on 'em and some of 'em would have two tires. Just keep coming with 'em—put 'em in the back yard and junk 'em. Give ten dollars for 'em—maybe get fifty dollars for 'em by the time you get the aluminum out of 'em and stuff. Sheet brass was seventy-five cents a pound—I'm talking about World War I, before World War I, 1914. Scrap 'em back there in the alley.

If we was back there a-digging around we could—course filled it in quite a bit with puttin' the stuff in there. We could dig up I bet two big handful of bolts. There's iron in that ground. That was pretty good there.

That was my first car. You know, with the

squeeze bulb horn—that had that on it and I'm coming out Locust Street and my Dad was walking to work, he was working for the City of Bloomington then. I honked at him and he told me to get out of that damn thing—get out of there. Honk Honk! I wasn't old enough—I was only thirteen or fourteen. No I was thirteen. Thirteen or fourteen. I know I was still working at the Country Club.

Apprenticeship

I don't know—It was in September, but I don't know what date in 1914. I don't know the exact date now. Here's where I first started to work. That's the old Boiler Shop. And here was the Machine Shop. I started in there heatin' rivets, that didn't make the noise. So I went over to the master mechanic's office at noon hour and asked him if he wouldn't transfer me. I couldn't take all that boiler noise. You know, them air guns a-beatin', and that was the big shops.

You know 3,500 about 3,200 people worked over there in my apprenticeship. Once in a while you would hear about somebody pokin' somebody in the nose, but sometimes that was irritated too bad or somethin', but everybody got along in general, and I mean 90% I'd say. I never seen anything in my time there—You'd always—there's always gonna be a clown in the gang, someplace, you know. It was just that kind of stuff, but hell, outside that just like routine every day.

Lot of Irish and Germans. Before my time but a lot of 'em. Now kids like myself—apprentices I was telling you about. Some of the apprentice boys I can remember lived out on South Hill—from a German family. Their father was either a machinist or a boilermaker. Some of 'em were carpenters and carmen over in the Car Department. Their offsprings came along, like myself, my folks came from the old country and then it was okay. It was full of English, too. But what I'm getting at is the rule, you know, certain kind of multiplier, would always bring those, whatever that nationality—that's what would make the mix. Maybe one time it would be Irish, one time it would be German, one time it would be English, see. We had a lot of English work over there too. They was precise—they was awful proud of their work—but they're not strong or bully workers as the American workers. Well—after I served my apprentice I left here and went to work for different other railroads and then, when I

come back—in them days you had to go away for a year. You couldn't jump up from an apprentice to a machinist, you had to go out and work some other railroad and come back in a year and that's what I did. I went to the Wabash and the IC, Clinton, Villa Grove and Decatur. I got a job—I didn't have to go very far to get one. They give me a job right now.

Nights in the Roundhouse

I liked it because it was alive. We worked seven nights a week. I've seen the time there was thirty-five machinists in that Back Shop that could bump me off of that night shift, but they wouldn't take the night shift. Could bump me you know. Older in seniority. And sometimes they'd work four days a week daytime—we'd work seven and get paid for seven and a half. My helper drawed a bigger pension than some of the Back Shop machinists. You wouldn't believe it but it's true. You got a lot of oldtimers and you'd work that seven days a week.

I was kind of his (shop superintendent's) right hand man, see. He was out of St. Louis and he came here as a general foreman, then he went up to shop superintendent and me being the local chairman, you know, I had a lot of contact with him. I'm not bragging about myself or anything but I could do a pretty good job of anything they wanted done—you know machinists. I fought for my machinist trade when the machinist wouldn't give me a chance to use my hands and my skills to do it. 'Cause I learned the trade—just like you kids going to school—you're going to school to learn something. I wanted to learn to be a machinist; I didn't want to be part of a machinist—I wanted to do all of it and I did too.

When he come here, why heck, I could do anything and go anyplace. Of course, I was the local chairman, I had lot of ins between with him. I never turned in anything with him. What I mean I never did give in to him for something. You do something for me because I did lots of things for you—that's the way I work. That's the way I done my work. I couldn't do a haphazard job. It had to be right. I didn't like it that way.

I'll tell you another one too, but you talk about surprised—I went to go to work one night and I couldn't find my locker. We had

old wooden lockers then. They had had a big fire down there in the Roundhouse. Burned all my work clothes and everything. The Roundhouse—they used to put water on the floor, the concrete floor all the time, see—washing the boilers and especially in the wintertime they'd bring 'em in off the road full of ice and snow and they'd melt all around there and we didn't have flashlights in them days. Had what they call a torch light. Burned kerosene with a wick on it and this fellow went through the locker area; and that's what I had to inspect the engine with. Put the light out there—you didn't have a flashlight. Them was back in the days of the '20s, you know way back. Anyhow he come down there with that torch—swinging it. You know, walking down there and you know how your arms are going. The tank was full of gasoline now, and the Roundhouse was full of fumes. Well, I don't go to work until 11 o'clock at night, see. I work the last shift. And that all happened—and when I went to work I couldn't find my locker. Old wooden locker burned up—clothes and all.

Safety

Built back in the '70s and '80s. But I wanted to show you the most dangerous place I know around the railroad. Ah, here it is. Here's the most dangerous place on the railroad in them days (the ash pit). That there is the crane there and those engines come in there and they dump the fire down in that water and then this crane picks 'em up and puts 'em in the coal car, the ashes, you know, cinders. I always thought this was the most dangerous; what I was saying and I know it see, when I went to get off an engine and all that steam was in the air, you know we'd have fifteen—maybe ten to fifteen engines out there getting ready to leave town and four or five coming in, and I'd stepped on that thing, look like water, course the ash on them look like the ground.

There was this young guy, he weighed 200 pounds and not much higher than, oh, he was an inch or two taller, and he couldn't say Dewey, he'd say Lewey. "Lewey, I get all wet." "What'd you do?" "I fell in the cinder pit." I chew him out. That water in there sometimes gets pretty hot. I'm full of vinegar. I said, "Well Fred, I always stick my foot down in that before I go down in there and see what it is." You know there was a lot of people killed

down in there.

I'm just explaining to you just how dangerous, especially at nights you know—that's the most hard time to work, at nights. That's when your resistance is the lowest too. Oh yeah, I've seen fellows around there blowed their tops—cause they didn't get no rest in the day time. A lot of times they had sickness at home and half sick themselves and maybe they had health problems—nobody knowed about—something on their mind nobody knowed about—it was pretty tough. In general—ninety-five percent of the time it was—I enjoyed it. Ah hell, I'd rather work nights than days—why I say that, you're freer.

When you work in the Roundhouse you're not a one man unit and you don't stick the bolt in the hole for one guy and you put the nut on it, see. You got to do it all. You got to ream the hole out, you got to make the bolt and you put it in—drive it in, tighten it—it ain't like an automobile factory you put the spark plugs in here and the tires on up here—and so on—it ain't like that. In the Roundhouse it was the dirtiest, sloppiest job there was on the railroad. But that's where the money was.

Somebody has got to work nights—that's for sure or the train won't run, that's all. Nights are not desirable—but I loved it—should never have got married, in fact, should have stayed there 'cause I loved night work. Funniest thing in the world. Reason I liked it because you're on your own. If something happened here you had to figure it out. You couldn't say—"Hey come here—what do you think of this?" You had to do it. That's the reason I guess I liked it. I don't know what else. There wasn't another thing—you wasn't a one-job man—you had to find it, you had to fix it, you had to make it, if it had to be welded you had to burn it, if it had to be burned you had to burn it, if you had to make a machine you had to make it on the machine and whatever—maybe you had to make two or three operations on the machine before you got it made—that's the reason I liked it. You had to be a welder, electric, acetylene and a burner and a tester (air tester), inspector, federal inspection—you had responsibility and I loved it. I just loved it—there wasn't nothing like it. When that engine got its steam up it belonged to me and I wanted it. I don't know why but it was just that way.

You think I didn't do a lot of dangerous

work? You know that's a 150 ton crane up there. Had to lift that engine up and go over the top of the others—goes all the way down. Now I've changed all of 'em, cables. Changed all of 'em cables—575 feet long, 1 inch cables. I believe it was twelve wraps. Six across, yeah I believe it was 675 feet long, 1 inch cables. I had two guys up there and I had to tie a rope on and let 'em down. They couldn't stand that 70 feet up there. They had a nose bleed. Young lads. Way younger than I was and hell, I'm talking thirty to forty years ago. Thirty-five.

We'd have "safety first" meetings and things like that, and you was always warned, but a lot of times people working nights don't think—don't get enough sleep in the daytime, see. I always was on the alert to watch for anything, see. You didn't always watch yourself, you always watched the other guy. It's like playing football on this side of the line. You know the guy runnin' the ball, you got to guess which one it was going to be.

They was several of 'em lost the ends of their fingers—get 'em pinched. Lookee here. (Holds out middle and fourth finger) See that one? See, the cable broke on the crane and it took that right off—right off. You know, cut it right off and come down and took this one this way and I guess I went to Brokaw, course since I got older that begins—I guess I got arthritis—swells up there. Don't hurt. That come off there, you see, and then the old doctor—you know what he done? He just taped that on there and I went back to work. I went back and went to work. Operated a machine. Couldn't operate the job I was doing but I operated a machine. For about two months that way. It's funny, there's not a stitch mark in there—he just taped it on. Old Doc Brian.

Eyeballin'

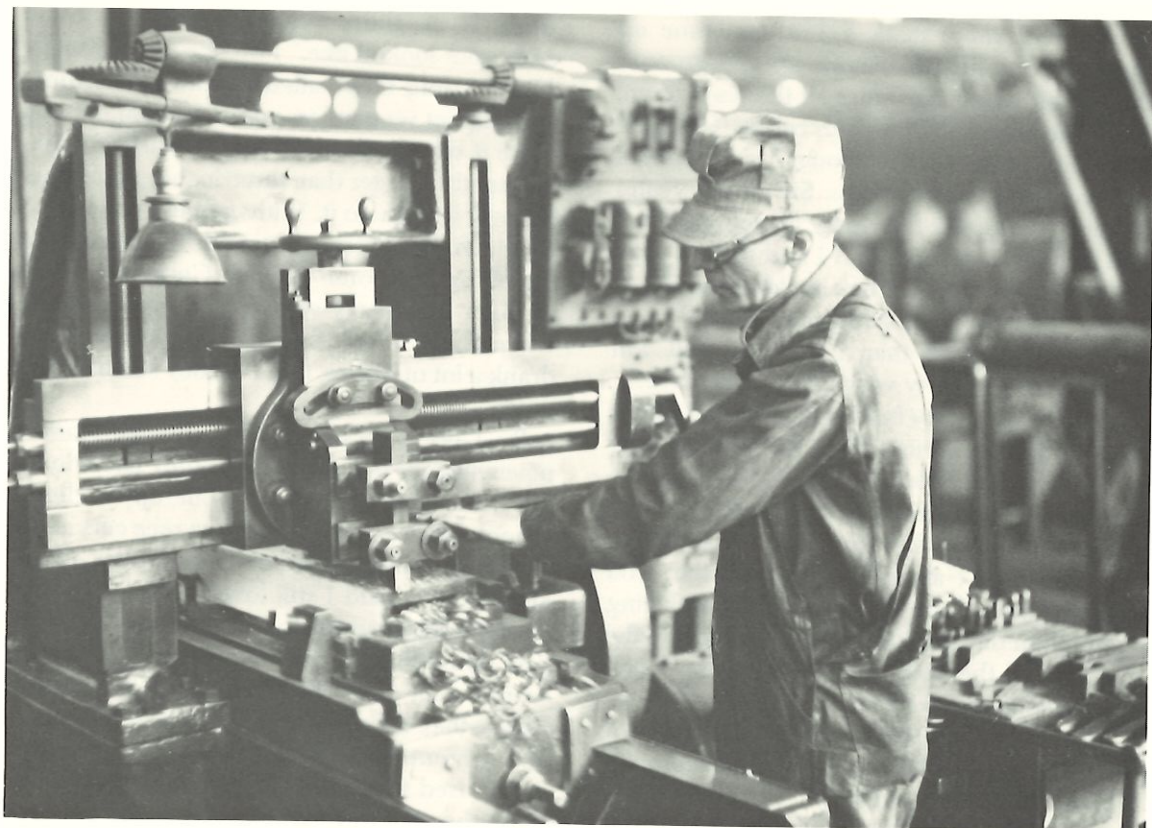
Generally, you know, you take kids that their fathers were workin' for the railroad and brought up that way. I said you got the touch, so I showed him, this young lad—I said you want to get that thing a certain distance, you chalk that and then you mark a quarter inch off there, then you set your calipers to start from this mark and then you take the middle off till it comes to that mark. You go across there a quarter of an inch a-draggin' it. When that drags across there it is O.K. He said, "Didn't you use mics (micrometers)?" I said,

"Hell, I was thirty years old before I knew what mics looked like." I do like the oldtimers done it, drag they called it—drag. Micrometers only let you, unless you force 'em, let you make it what it is. You want to make it a ten-thousandth bigger than three inches, micrometers will let you do it. With calipers you had to have that drag. I learned that down there from the oldtimers. Some of them Germans—some of them big, heavy-set German boys or men, when I was a kid, they had the touch. They drank a lot of booze, too, but they still had that touch.

By God, you never seen, I mean they'd never stagger but you'd know they had a load. Oh well, shucks. Now I went up to diesel school and as I told you I drove race cars and I built racers and messed on automobiles, every kind there is, and I still love the smell of that steam engine and the feel of it. I don't know. It was something. Course there was a lot of work—a lot of work. You know, you take the flues—they'd lime up; if you know anything about home cooking and tea kettles, the old water used to lime inside the tea kettle—well, that's the way them boilers get, so the government says they got to take them flues out every five years. Hell, sometimes that lime was that thick in them boilers

Course the diesel is more powerful but, they cost like hell too. But that's all they had at that time. Course, when they was about ready to give up the steam locomotive, why they began to improve. Then the diesel come along. Can't beat the diesel power. You know, with the diesel you got the traction to get started, with the steam engine you got less traction but you got more horsepower as it momentums. That seems funny doesn't it? To me it does. But that's the truth, the diesel can pull, if you got 'em tied down someplace they'll take 'em out of there. But with the steam engine, you know, you've heard 'em start up a-slippin'. Choo-choo-chchoo-chchoo. Well after they get going they increase horsepower—a steam locomotive—a diesel is just the opposite.

Oh, I don't know, all the excitement of the steam locomotive. You missed the—I can't explain to you what kind of a feeling it is. It's something you like to always be doing. You want to be around it. Lots of times I seen the steam engines the first year or two I came along. When we had our plant north of Normal



Machinist at planing mill, January 1937. (Pantagraph photo)

on the IC, you know, where they got the gravel and sand. I'd stop and watch them go by. Just something there, I don't know what you'd call it. I couldn't . . . It just was something inside you and you couldn't get it out, it stayed there. I loved it.

Well, I guess that's the way life is. I know in my lifetime, some jobs the men who can handle 'em are worth more money. The man without a skill shouldn't get as much as the skilled man. That's my theory of life or labor and they should make arrangements someway or another on the in-between. A lot of times you've got, we had a lot of 'em on the railroad—you had to get a certain man to do a certain job. The other man couldn't do it but they both got the same money. Now what do you call that?

Now I was uptown one time over at the Moose Lodge and they had a dance and I had a few beers. They bought a new pump for the Fire Department and they loaded the old one on a flat car at the IC freight house up here and then they took the new one—they took the old one off and put the new one on the flat car and shipped it right back to the factory.

They put this one up to the fire house—that's when it was where that restaurant is now—on Front Street, and the hose wouldn't fit. Now, I was up at the Moose Lodge and I'd had two beers and went up to have lunch and have a few beers. They got nine machinists over there on that second shift and nobody could do it and so they called me up and asked me to come in. Every one of 'em was younger than I was. The foreman, the two foremen, the general and the two gang foremen, neither one of them could do it. They're supposed to know and if you can't do it, they're to instruct you.

So the one general he calls the Moose and gets me out on it. I says, "I've been kinda partyin' up here at the Moose tonight and I don't know if I can come over or not," course I wasn't staggerin' or nothing but I had a few beers in me. So I went over and it's a good thing I think that I had a few beers in me to settle my nerves. The chief, the assistant chief and two firemen standing out in front of the shop and the foreman over here and another guy over there and I'm a-doing the work.

First thing, you got to make a grindin' tool to fit that thread—it was eight threads to the

inch—and the nut was 8 inches in diameter and it should have been 8 inches and it was only 7%. You got to cut the top of the threads off and go down in the well and make the cellar deeper again. I went through all that and I got that done—"By golly," the general foreman said, "I told you I could get it for you"—told this fire chief that he could do it—he couldn't, he couldn't start the machine. I'm not braggin', I'm just tellin' you some things I went through there.

God a-mighty—any other time when you'd been drinkin' they wouldn't have let you on the property. Now I wasn't drunk, I never did get what you would call drunk. I never believed in that but I had had a few beers and didn't drink whiskey, only beer, it won't give you the "diejesus" if you drink enough of it. Of course I haven't been drinkin' any whiskey, I've drank two or three beers since 1948.

I was going to tell you, that foreman, you know, he'll get all the credit for it. He'll tell his superior, "I had to call Penn in to come in and give us a little hand. You know I'm not supposed to use the machine." He couldn't face a nut on it. Take the skin off a nut, I knowed that that's the reason he called me.

Whatever I done I always tried to do good—you know what I mean. If I can't get it done—couldn't do it—I'll tell you about it. I said nooo, I don't want nothing to do with it, I couldn't do it. "I ain't no miracle man," I said. If you go ahead and want me to do a job and I can do it. If I hadn't a'had this audience around there—everytime I looked one of them guys was lookin' in see what I'm doing, wonderin' what it's all about. They never seen it done and I don't think that foreman did either. If he was that good he'd instruct the mechanic he had on the job. And if the mechanic couldn't do it then he's allowed to do it himself while the mechanics are watching him. He wouldn't tackle it or he wouldn't have called me. You have those kind of people now, you know.

What's them things? Them stripes, you know, in the Army—not these here, I don't mean these down here—them are bravery and so forth. Well, that's the kind of guy he was. He had the stripe but he didn't have the gump-tion behind it. Well I never—called and asked me about it years ago—"Why hell yes, I can do that." "You ever do it before?" I said no! "How the hell you know you can do it?" "I have con-

fidence in myself." That's the same way with anything, you got to have confidence, you got it, you can make it, if you haven't got it you ain't gonna make it. I would like to do some things over, but we can't all be Christ, somebody's got to be the devil, I guess. My mom used to give me heck when I'd say that. She was very religious. Very religious. My older sister was going to be a nun but she got half way and quit; she couldn't take it either.

Union Activity

I was the local chairman of the Machinists, one time had 575 men. That's helpers, apprentices, specialists and machinists. Grievance. Grievance—that's your job, grievance, and see that everybody lives up to the contract and one thing and another.

1922 Strike

We went out on strike July 1, 1922. I worked in the Roundhouse then, that was the only job I could get. It was only night work. I'd be twenty-four years old—just about twenty-four—I was twenty-four. I'll be eighty-five the 8th day of next month. Can't play no more football though—I couldn't.

National Guard

The neighbors didn't like it over there on the West Side, but I don't think they cared too much for it up and around the Courthouse either with the soldiers. I've heard of stories about things that went on but I never seen anything. I never seen nothing, only stop somebody and question 'em and that's all I ever seen. But I heard a lot of shop talk about that.

I had to picket at night. I had to picket but I never had any serious trouble. A fellow wants to take that chance to go in there and work—that's his business. But I'd ask him. I've asked people not to go in but I'm not going to give nobody harm to stop 'em. I don't believe in that. They'll eventually stub their toe some place else. They have done it in my lifetime and I've seen hundreds of 'em since. Stub their toe and when they needed help they couldn't get it. Somebody remembered back things that happened away back. A lot of jobs was lost that way. Like—I'd come to you—you'd come to me for a job and you'd done something like that—I can't give you a job and you couldn't give me a job. People won't let you.



National Guard machine gun nest, Roundhouse, 1922 strike. (McLean County Historical Society)

They had a lot of troubles over there. Sometimes, I don't know—I never seen it. Any real trouble. I did hear the shots a couple of times but nobody got hit that I knowed of. My uncle was on the police force and he was a detective and he had to walk that beat. Protect the West Side. You don't know—you hear a lot of them stories and sometimes they ain't right. I don't think they really needed the militia when they brought 'em in. I didn't think so. Course, I was young and always on the night run and the younger fellows and unmarried had to take the night run. They was a lot of 'em guys that stayed in there and work—it didn't do no good in later years.

I remember one thing—one guy—I ain't gonna call his name. He come here from out in Nebraska someplace. He told me this 'cause he was an electrician and I was a machinist and we worked on them cranes—them big ones and little ones. He'd cut the wires loose and I'd take the motors out. He told me when he come in here and left a shop out in the West and got a job here, he said, "I had seven kids and I come here and went to work. I was ashamed to go to work out there so I come here." Well, when they made the—got the Union back in and made the new seniority roster, they come out with the roster and they had him number one on the roster.

And he went to the Union and told the Union that he didn't want number one. He says "I couldn't stand to see my kids die,"—he says, "I had to feed 'em." But he wouldn't take number one spot on the seniority roster of the electricians. "Well," I said, "You got some good in you." But he was an electrician.

We didn't make 'em as good as he was here. We didn't make 'em. I mean in our shop, cause he had a shop where it was big, you know, where he worked the business. In the railroad shop some of them electricians only worked on them light poles there—street lights and things like that. Didn't have many motors or anything around there and built 'em in those days—my early part of life they didn't over there. They done it afterwards. Of course they got the diesels in the big shop then.

I always liked that guy. I kinda thought it was funny too. My God, he was a better man than I thought he was, says he didn't want to be ahead of anybody else in there, only wanted his day to come to work. I'd seen here a couple of years ago that he died out there in Normal someplace. I don't remember the street. Just happened to pick the paper up the day of the funeral. It was out in Normal and that was the last I ever heard anybody talk about him. What I was trying to say there, was he was destituted and he had his kids come first—he come last, is what he told me. He told me that, we's up there on that big crane taking the motor out. He was cutting the wires. I had to take 'em up, then take a block and pulley, let 'em down and bring another one up. And he told me that—him and I was up on that big crane, we was the only two—summertime—wasn't cool up there—wasn't hot either 'cause I had the windows open in the skylight. But I always thought afterwards about that, by gosh, when I read where he died and it was in the paper. By God, he told me—he says "I was a scab, but," he says, "I'm doing it for my kids." That's the way he told me.

Depression

Last time I was laid off was—I wasn't laid off since the Second World War. Yes, I was too. I got laid off in the Crash—you know, the Wall Street Crash? Back in the '30s. It was tough. That was when pork chops was 15¢ a pound and nobody had it.

So I got, I worked for the City of Bloomington—you know, driving machinery, graders

and trucks and snow plows and stuff like that. Got quite bit of that time in. But outside of that, why I went, ah heck, I went everyplace looking for a job. I went one place when I found it was over in Indiana. I happened to read something the other day about that, two hundred in a line going after one job—40¢ an hour. That's all this job was paying in them days. Paid 40¢ an hour and the guy said "I wished I'd waited and I'd hired you. You said you was a machinist." They was a-makin' these scoop shovels—just pushin' this sheet of iron in there. Pretty hard sometimes just to hit anything. 40¢ an hour. I didn't do much when I was first laid off—'29 Crash. I didn't think it would last. But it did—it lasted too long.

I was going to say that until the Railroad Pension Law come in then, we had unemployment on the railroad. We didn't have it (pension) before that. That was the greatest thing in the world. This depression right here—half of the population would be killed by now if it was like in the 1930s, to my notion. It's my opinion because it was pretty rough them days, but they've got to do something one way or another—they've got to.

Savings

They used to teach us in school. "Had to save your money." Ever hear that one? Pennies, nickels in there when you was in the first, second or third grade and then when the school year was up you had all that change. Maybe you'd have twelve or thirteen dollars. That was a lot of money when you was a little kid.

I say that's what they ought to do with labor people and I'm a union man, too, and I'm telling you that's what they should do. Take it away from you, you know voluntary, I don't mean really take it away from you. But something like that would be good if they would—put so much of that hard-earned wage in a savings account someplace. I always believed in it. I might be wrong. I might be a socialist but I believe in it. It could be done. Then you wouldn't be leanin' on your uncle all the time. You'd have just as much money as he'd have. You know who I mean—Uncle Sam.

Sports

Now I got more thrills in there messin' around on them live engines, workin' on them, than I

did when I drove the race car to Fairbury when I was only twenty years old. More thrill to it. It was out there on the race track with the people in the county fairs—and dirt tracks around.

Shops, Football Team

I loved to play football but I won't do it now. I got bunged up too much. There's one time we had all the crafts—boilermakers, blacksmiths, machinists, electricians, carmen, us apprentice boys, had a football team. We went up to Streator, this old machinist and not a one of us—I had a helmet and never had no pads or nothing. Just a sweater and old football pants—no football shoes, just a pair of old tennis shoes and we played up there at Streator on the fairgrounds before 9,000 people. Imagine that? I imagine what that machinist—us apprentice boys, what that machinist got out of that. I know he got ten percent of that gate receipt. I know it.

And we was back here and who do you think wrote to this machinist wanting a football game with our team? George Halas. Decatur. At Staley's. He was down there at Staley's with that ball team. His football team and he had a ball team too. Staley's silk manufacturing—I don't know, corn products. 1919 we went up there for a game. I said to Hackett—old Johnny Hackett—"No wonder we couldn't play them guys—they are professionals." I said, "That man that's runnin' down there. Old Howowitz, he went to school over at Illinois in Red Grange's time. We ain't got no business down there." I said, "I'm not going." So he had to cancel it. It would have been a terrible thing down there, 'cause they was professionals then, you know. I say maybe a year or two—maybe it was only one year—I don't know. It was back in 1919. Now, we didn't have shoulder pads—not a one of us. We played that sandlot football. Kids.

Reagan—I've seen him from Eureka College, playing baseball out here. With Doc Elliott and them guys. Yeah, he went to Eureka College. He'd come over and play baseball. Had an old wooden fence around that Wilder Field, where the stadium is now.

Retirement

Date of my retirement—June the 30th—it would be 1963, yeah, 1963. I never had no

intention of retiring when I went to work and I didn't blow my top, quit or anything like that. I went in to see the clerk. Locomotive inspector and air testing and I went in to see what time the next freight train was leaving and what was coming in—get the line-up, as we call it. He said, "Say, J. D., you can't guess what I'm doing." I said, "Why, you're running that typewriter, George." "Yeah, but you don't know what I'm typing." I said, "No I don't know that." I asked him about different train numbers that was coming in and he said, "I'm making out Mac's pension papers." (That was Mac McEndridge) I said, "Oh you are?" "Yeah." I said, "George, if you aren't too busy, by golly make mine out, too, when you get done." That's how I retired. Just like that. What I mean, I didn't blow my top or nothing, I don't mean I quit or got mad at somebody or got discouraged or anything. I just retired. Of course I was figurin' on another year later.

You see, what I had figured was my nephew was business agent for the Laborers and I asked him about this new hard road coming in. And I had some Social Security different times when laid off. I thought, well, if I could get some of that in there, why I could get the minimum of the Social Security, which was \$40 at that time. That will take care of household utilities and my pension from the railroad will take care of the rest. By golly, it was a good thing I did too, because I netted about \$330 a month which I wouldn't have had from the railroad, just in four years that I put in on the hard road. Four summers.

You know, you work about nine, ten or eleven months a year. I was on 55 around Normal. I got that job of weighing the gravel. I was strong in the arms then from pulling on them heavy wrenches and I just moved right along. We loaded up there—there was two of us—you have four bins in there. A and B rock in each one. A and B and A and B. The other guy, he'd load his two up. The truck would move up and he'd get the other two. That superintendent told my nephew, he said, "I'm going to have to take that old man off that job." I said, "You go back and tell that big long drink of water if he wants me off that job I'll take myself off." I said, "I'm not out here beggin' for anything."

He used to come up and feel my arms, what he didn't know was pulling them heavy wrenches around all the time—I was small but I had power in my shoulders, see. I could do a pretty good job lifting, too, as far as that goes. With my weight of course, my weight in them days was right around about 160-168 pounds. I never regretted it. I never will forget that. I think his hair turned gray overnight.

I worked for McDougal and Hardson, contractors out of Peoria, hard road. We had to have stuff made and I said, "Why, I know where you can get it." He said he was going to have to go back to Peoria to get it. I said, "What for?—Why heck, I can take you over to the railroad to the Store Department and get that piece made." So I went with the general mechanic and went to the Shops and they made it. Of course they charge 'em for it—they don't give it to 'em. But they made this shoe and the guy said when I went in—"I thought you retired." "I did, off the road—I work for the hard road now." I worked out there I guess maybe four years. I enjoyed it. Give me something to do.

Different ones retired and went to work—didn't come up on the hard road—no. A lot of them retired and took janitor jobs, bank guard jobs and stuff like that, you know. They—some of them that done that bawled me out for taking a job on the hard road. I said, "I been figurin' this for two years now." I said, "I only need two more quarters and I can get the minimum of Social Security" and I said, "That \$40 a month will pay my household utilities. I want to live a little while yet."

The same guy that got on me one time—I met him uptown there and he said, "When I take a pension I'm not going to—I'm done working." "Well," I said, "That's your business but maybe you'll change your mind." I do my banking with the First National Bank and I went into the drive-in one day and he had a broom sweeping around there and I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I told you I wouldn't take a job but I got one." Ha ha! So you never know what you really want to do.

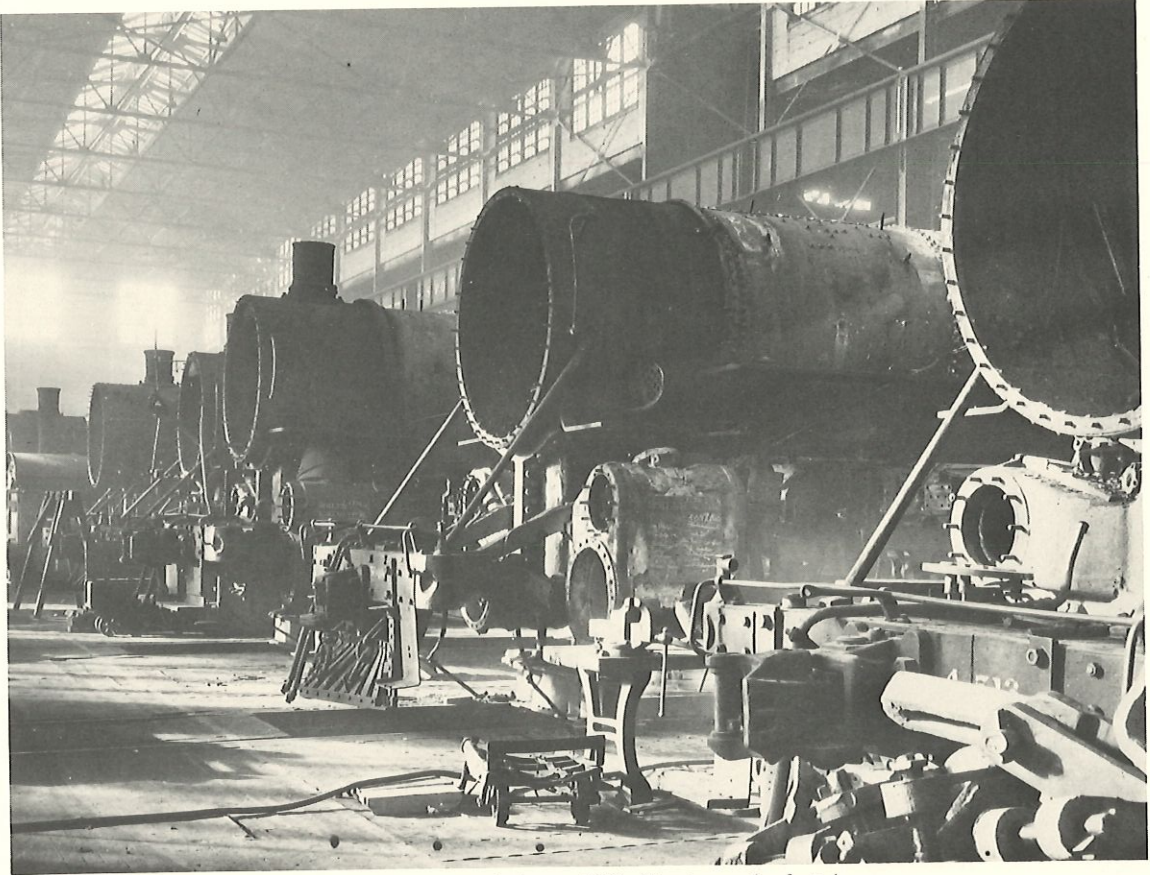
I go up here once in a while, they bring that switch engine, now the diesel, and they bring that diesel over here and they do the switchin' over here now. Them guys that's engineers

were rookie firemen when I was over there and I was relief foreman and they worked for me and I know about 'em, see, and they'll see me up there. Of course I go to the meat market up here and my cousin lives there in the house. His sister used to run the grocery store there and I always go by there and I hear that train coming and I go out there—I don't care what one is coming, you just want to go and see it.

I don't think I could have done my life much better than I did—I don't believe it could have

been changed. Oh, it could have been changed for the better, not for the worse, I don't think but it could have been better. I see people have everything they want, you know, like that and wealth and everything else and still they're not satisfied. Something missing. I'll tell you the only dang thing that's missing is 'cause they didn't do it themselves. Take them hard knocks, would be easy now—ride the punts—you'd feel better.

Interviewer: Mike Mulberry



Locomotive Backshops, 1936. (Pantagraph photo)

Heading to Bloomington, the Alton's first diesel, B&O 50, pulls the streamlined "Abraham Lincoln" south. (Baltimore & Ohio Railroad)

**Hard Times:
1929-1939**



Raymond B. Bennett

Upholsterer is not a trade that one would normally associate with the boilermakers and carmen of the Rail Shops, but upholsterers were vital to maintaining the plush passenger cars that the railroad operated and used to impress the travelling public.

Raymond Bennett was born in Booneville, Indiana, his family coming to Bloomington about 1915 to look for work. His father was a laborer in the Shops, and his son, an early graduate of Normal Community High School, went to work as an upholsterer's apprentice, serving under his future father-in-law, William Reiner.

His story reveals the variety of trades it took to fill the needs of the railroad. Because of his upholstery speciality, he and his father-in-law eventually opened their own shop, Reiner and Bennett Upholstery, with Ray Bennett leaving the railroad to devote full time to this business.

Childhood

My father lived in Indiana and he was a sheriff and he thought he could do better in Illinois. Illinois at that time seemed like the land of prosperity. I was five years old.

We came by train and later on they had the furniture shipped up here. We came up here with my father's sister and her family. We moved into Normal temporarily and then he got a job on the farm for about a year and a half. Then they moved back to Normal permanently, when I was about seven years old. He even had a few cows and chickens and stuff like that. Once a farmer always a farmer. My mother worked at the VanLeer estate in Normal.

My father worked what they called the Storeroom. That involved several jobs and departments. But, he was working in the Lumber Yard. The lumber was given to the other departments for their various jobs.

I can remember that he worked there when I was a child going to school. He was there during the 1922 Strike and before that when they had the water pollution. So many people got sick. A few even died from typhoid fever. That was just before we got into the First

World War. That has been about fifty years ago, that is a long time to remember.

At that time (1922 Strike) he was a laborer and they didn't have to belong to the Union. They would let them laborers go through and work. Later on they got so strict about the Union lines and everything that even he couldn't go to work. So, he had to stay home, too. There was some violence. He would talk about some violence. But, it wasn't as bad as some of the violence later on.

I went to Normal Community High School, at that time it was on the east side of Normal. Our class was taken over to the new high school that was more on the west side. We were the first graduating class of that school. Our picture is still hanging there someplace. That was in 1929, the first graduating class.

After I graduated I worked at the Hayes and Custer Stove Foundry. They still had the stove foundry then. Then, I put in an application at all the shops because I thought it was a good idea to have the same job that my father-in-law did. Well, that was when I started to go with my wife then. At the same time I had an application in at Moran's Meat

Market and one in at an electrical company and believe it or not I got the chance to choose between the three of them. I chose upholstering. I kept at upholstering for forty years after I chose it.

Apprenticeship

We had to serve a four-year apprenticeship and during that four-year apprenticeship we had to go to school. They had a branch of the International Correspondence School from Chicago here at that time and every Friday we had to go to school. During that school period they sent instructors down. In those days high school education was comparable to a two-year college education now. So, if you went to high school you didn't have to take general math and stuff like that. I went straight into trig. school.

We learned through apprenticeship, which was right there on the job. John Shoemaker was the foreman and each apprentice had what they called a mechanic or a tradesman and mine was Mr. Reiner. I was Mr. Reiner's apprentice.

They (wages) were pretty good for that time. Railroad wages at that time was lower than some factory wages. When I was an apprentice my wages were about 48 or 49¢ an hour. My dad got that as a laborer. Of course, later on they kept boosting that up until the wages got better.

At the shop we would start work at 7 a.m. and would work five hours until 12 noon and then you would go back to work at 1 p.m. and would work until 4 p.m. We had to punch in the clock at ten minutes 'till that time. Now, later on they worked us from 7 a.m. until 12 noon and have lunch from 12 to 12:30. We would work from 12:30 until 3:30.

Most of the time we took our lunch. At that time there was a hotel called the C & A Hotel close. It was about a three-story building. They served lunch family-style. It was all you could eat for 25¢. Once in a while we would go over there.

At that time I lived 'way out on a truck farm that my Dad had bought and I had to have my mother drive us in. Or, I would come in by streetcar. My dad would be working also.

She (my mother) drove us into work or we would take the early morning streetcar. The streetcar would take us right down into Chestnut Street and we would walk under a subway

that was under the railroad at that time, right into the Shops.

We had a Graham-Paige. It was a Paige car first and then the Graham Company bought it out and for about three years they called them Graham-Paiges until they got the new name established. Then, they were called Grahams. We bought one of the first Graham-Paiges. It was a good-sized car.

Working

Nowadays, you think about upholstering furniture and things of that sort. But, in those days the upholstery job was involved. We did all the carpet work for the passenger cars and the wooden cars. We did the mattress and the seat work. We did floor work and curtain work. The cars then would be mostly wooden, believe it or not. They weren't steel cars like nowadays. They had a padded roof. The upholsterers' job was to take, stretch, what we called mule hide, it was an artificial leather, and we would stretch it out along the top of the cars. After that the painters came along and they would swab several coats of paint until it got real thick and hard and that was the tops of the cars in those days. I can't remember the year, but we were one of the first ones in the Shops to put in air-conditioning. The upholsterers' job was to insulate all the air-conditioning pipes, all the air-conditioning units and things like that. It was interesting. I remember one year they sent a load of cattle in and it was about ten degrees above zero. It was real cold. The winds were blowing and it was snowing. It was over the weekend. The cattle was going to freeze to death. Well, we knew we had to protect the cattle, so they had the upholsterers go out and get a lot of duck or canvas (they called this duck) and we had to take and pack ducking all around the cattle cars to keep those cattle from freezing. We had to do that in that weather. We had all kinds of jobs like that. Sometimes we upholsterers would do all kinds of things.

It involved many different trades in those days. We were the first ones to maintain the upholstery work in Abraham Lincoln and Rutledge Cars. They took the two Red Trains and named them after Lincoln and Rutledge. We maintained those cars. We had to redo them fancy. We had to put the carpet in and things. The old-fashioned railroad was really more



Upholstery Shop, 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

interesting than when the diesel came in.

We were really practical jokers. I remember one time a funny thing happened. There was a fellow from Tennessee that was a laborer that worked in the Paint Shop. We were up putting a roof on, struggling on, and this guy had his mop down there. There was a fellow Chester, who was an upholsterer, who has been dead for years. He had just gone down to Tennessee with no education. He was about forty-four years old and he brought back a sixteen-year-old bride. We got to asking him how in the world he could have a sixteen-year-old bride. They were kidding him about it and he told us he was skeet-shooting and "I had a brand-new .22 rifle and this man tried out my new rifle and he liked it real well and he told me he would trade me this new rifle for his daughter. Well," he says, "we got married and she came back." About a year and a half after that she ran off with another man. Well, this fellow was pretty touchy about it. So, one day Chester was working and he made this comment, "Did you ever hear from your runaway wife?" Well, this fellow came over and got onto the ladder and said, "One more step and I'll push the ladder over." We did all kinds of things and we had a lot of fun. We had a first-aid man

that we called "Doc Iodine" because anytime anyone would get hurt, he would put iodine on it. That fellow, his name was Carruthers. Well, later on he became the head of the Red Cross here in McLean County.

We had safety meetings. And we had contests for no accidents. I think the ones who went the longest without any accidents on the reports would get some kind of prize. Of course, our job wasn't as dangerous as some of the other jobs.

I remember many different departments. There was a Wheel Department and the Machine Shops in which they worked with the engines. There was the Roundhouse where they did the actual work with the engines. It was quite a booming industry for that time. There was a Freight Car Yard. Some of the names I remember. John Whittington was the foreman of the Paint Shop. John Shoemaker was a foreman. Flynn was the foreman of the Pipemakers' Shop and Tin Shop. Yorkie was the foreman of the Cabinet Shop. I can't remember a whole lot about it anymore.

Social Life

I know at that time we had most of our festivities at the Western Avenue Community Cen-

ter. That is where I met Mrs. Bennett, at one of those dances. We also had a volleyball team. We had fun at work too. We would practice volleyball. Of course, we had an hour at that time.

Layoffs

The only thing that was uncomfortable for me at times was layoffs. It got so that later on we had quite a few layoffs. We called the men who had quite a bit of seniority the “ones with whiskers.” We younger people didn’t have enough seniority so we would be the first ones to be laid off. Sometimes, we would be laid off for a month or two out of a year. That was another reason that I quit the Shops after we got our business started and built up. Our business was steady and the Shops were not always steady. There was one year I was laid off more than I worked.

Depression

It affected the Shops just like any other industry. It was affected badly at times. There was a time when there were only a few people work-

ing. Now, at one time when I first started working I think we had about two thousand employees. That was before State Farm came in. The railroad was the main thing then. The Shops were called the Alton Shops to begin with. Then, they were called the Chicago & Alton. Later on, before I quit there, Baltimore and Ohio bought it, but they still called it C & A. When it was C & A we had a triangle. It was Chicago, St. Louis and Kansas City.

Upholstery Business

We had been doing work during the weekends and during the evenings and even holidays. Well, it got to the point where the work backed up on us. So, we decided that he or I would have to quit work to take care of our business. Well, he only had another year to go before he would retire so it would be a shame if he quit, so I quit. I then took care of the business.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte



Refurbished parlor car chairs, “Ann Rutledge” observation car, late 1940s. (William Dunbar collection)

Stephen M. Tudor

One of three brothers who were painters at the Shops, Stephen M. Tudor has a fun and fascinating story to tell, reflecting an individual with an independent streak and a sense of humor.

Tudor was preceded in the Shops by his older half-brother Frank and his twin brother, "Pug"—John Ivan. Raised together in a large family in Beason, the brothers not only painted together, but also operated a wallpapering and painting business to help them during hard times.

Stephen, along with John Ivan, both held union office for many years, with Stephen the president of Lodge 507, the "Red Hummer Lodge," of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen. Besides representing their fellow workers, the two also planned social events for the shop workers.

This interview reflects a hard-working, dedicated individual, who not only put in his eight hours at the Shops, served with the Union, and ran a paint and wallpapering business, but also built his own home—out of old boxcars!

Childhood

My father was married before he married my mother. See, my mother was a Davis. And she married a Shifflet, she had two girls and a boy by John Shifflet. Then she married John Tudor and he had two girls and a boy. She had two girls and a boy and there was five when she had me and Pug. Which made seven. She was by herself. The girl's aunt and uncle took the girls. Some doctor educated George. And that left Frank, Florence, Irene, and me and Pug at home. Well, the banker down there, he educated Florence up here at college—she went through college up here. And Frank, he was a cook in Malloy's restaurant—a restaurant down in Atlanta and later on he came up here and went to work for the railroad. And that's the way we got started up here. We didn't do too bad, of course we didn't have an education. I didn't have any; sixth grade. What I had to learn I learned. I got me a book and I learned how to do things that I had to do.

Harmonica

Well, I didn't learn to play it. I don't know

nothing about music. My Ma bought me a little harp for a dime one time. She washed for a living down there in Atlanta, anybody down there knows that. I sat on the back porch and fooled with that thing and I just played snatches of tunes. Finally got so I could play parts of them, I didn't know all of any of them I don't think. I had a lot of fun with it. Then, when we got to running around, going to skating rinks and dances, that was the only thing we did you know, we usually had to walk and we would get out along the road and play that and everybody would dance and have a good time. We had a lot of fun with it. I still got it. We went to Murphy's Hall that had a skating rink and you could get in for a dime or 15¢. In Atlanta. It's tore down now. It was right next to City Hall.

Next to City Hall was where Mr. Piper ran a shoe shop and that is where my wife lived. Her grandfather raised her. So I knew Janet all my life and I married her. I asked her to marry me when I was 15. And she said, "What will you do to make a living?" and I said, "Oh, I'll do something! Ha, ha!" I was in the Army and one

time she came down there. They told me that a young lady had come down to see me and I couldn't figure out who that was, as I wasn't chasing no women. Well, it was Janet and I said, "Well, what are you doing down here?" "Well," she said, "You asked me to marry you, didn't you?" and I said, "Yeah." "Well, I figure it is about time!" So we went and got married.

First Car

A '13 Model T. That is what it was, a 1913 Model T. Med and Mike had it. They hunted and trapped for a living, besides shooting craps and gambling. Ha. Anyway, that's the way they made their living, besides playing pool, you know, and working on the farm or something. They were pretty good guys, anyway, and so was Mike. They had ropes on the wheels instead of tires—big heavy ropes striped around them. You could go on down the field with them . . . just wrap a chain around them or something and go in and out you know, in the wintertime, and didn't have no back on it, just a flatbed. They get some pelts on them and tie them down and take them home and skin them, you know. And that's what they went trapping in. It didn't have no top, just a broken down windshield.

One day they were going to quit so I bought it off of them for \$19.00. And it didn't have any tires on it so I couldn't go anywhere in it, much. One kid got a tire and somebody gave us one and we finally got it outfitted with tires. Whoever had a half a dollar to get a couple gallons of gas, we would get in it and go down to Lincoln or McLean or whatever was going on close around, 5 or 10 miles. They would always come home with it and try to leave enough gas in it so I would have a little gas or if I made a quarter. Everybody used it—it sat out in front of the pool hall.

We decided one day we were going to fix the clutch. You know, it's got all plates in it. We took it all apart—there were two left that we couldn't get back in, so we just left them out. It never seemed to make any difference. Ha! I was 14 or 15, someplace around in there. We had license plates. You just bought a license plate and go.

My brother and I weren't much older than that, we worked tying wiring and driving teams. 25¢ a day to drive a team or half a dollar a day for tying wires. We finally bought us a little, what they call a "lightning horse-

power." And we would stop at the farmers and we would make a dollar a day out of it. Of course we would have to feed the horses. We made a living. And then when the First World War broke out, the government hired us to run a baler for them. We knew how. I ran one up around McLean for the government and my brother ran one down around Atlanta. We went around and baled hay on the farms and the government hauled it in and put it in box cars and shipped it to Europe, I guess. We made \$4.00 a day for that and that was good money, then. That's just about the size of what I done all my life, I guess. I done about everything you can think of to make a nickel.

Hired on the Railroad

I went to work for the railroad right after the strike. I got a job in the Storeroom. They would put a harness on us, kind of like a dog harness, and there would be four or six men that would have them on. And we would pull wagons down in the Yards where they had stored parts for the engines. They made everything down there. They had their own Foundry and everything. We would load them up with bars etc. Bill Bavester was our boss, he may be living yet. I am not sure; he worked for Eureka-Williams later. He was the boss and we would haul things into the Machine Shop and back in the shop, wherever they were going to work on it. Sometimes during the day we would haul ice around to the different ice machines for water. Things like that.

After awhile they gave me a job in the Store-room pushing a three wheel wheelbarrow. You went around to different stations, they had boxes with cards in them where they would order some bolts or this or that. They were small and you could take them in the wheelbarrow. I would pick up the orders and go to the Storeroom and fill the wheelbarrow with orders and take them back and deliver them where I got them. I got a little more money for that. I think we got around 17½¢ an hour or something like that. But everytime you got a better job—you got another 2¢ or so.

Then they said—"The old man wants to talk to you about coming over here as a sweeper—make a little more money." That was Mr. Whittington. Ed Seamon was assistant foreman. I said that was alright with me, anything for more money. So I go to sweeping floors. A fellow by the name of John swept on one end

and I swept on the other end. We would meet in the middle and the next day we would change ends . . . that made it not quite so monotonous, you know. We would load cars and swept and stuff like that . . . made a little bit more money.

After a while the ole man asked me if I would like to be a "helper," so he gave me a job as "helper." Along with other guys, you know, and my brother. I worked as a helper 'round there and we painted coal cars. They got two guys painting coal cars, one of them is Brice Williams—his boy is a retired mailman. Pug knows the other one. I know him but I can't think of his name. Well, I worked as a helper for a long time and got laid off several times. I was laid off one time and went to work with my step dad in 1923 or 1924. I worked for Indiana Bell for quite a while. Setting poles and running wires. Well, anyway, that had nothing to do with the railroad. Then I was in the Army and I got out of the Army and came home and went back to work for the railroad.

My brother Frank worked there before I did. Then I got a job there. Of course, I left there when I was laid off that time and I got a job working for Indiana Bell but I came back. My brother Ivan came there after I did. He was working there while I was working for Indiana Bell. He got laid off, came over there and worked two weeks and got called back and he went back. I didn't. That's the one we call "Pug." John Ivan is his name. He looked like a little pug-nosed dog when he was little. That is what they always told me. I always called him "Pug" and his wife never liked it. She would always say, "Who did you say?" and I would say, "I said, Pug." Ha, ha! And she finally got tired of asking me. She calls him Ivan but his name is "John Ivan." Well, we three brothers, we worked together all our life. And we never had a fuss about our jobs at all.

I came back in 1927. I got a job as a helper, that was in the Paint Shop. I never worked any place, only in the Paint Shop after that. I worked for Whittington who was superintendent and master painter. Ed Seamon was the assistant foreman.

You washed cars inside and out. Put up scaffolds for the painters, you know, general stuff that you would have to do, cleaning. Rubbing putty, at that time, but later on that was the mechanic's job.

The only thing that the helpers painted at that time was coal cars, now at the Steel Shop. But that changed after the Union came back in. Then the painters did that. They've got a picture of that up there now—one of them is Brice Williams, and my brother can tell you who the other guy is. I can't remember his name.

I sprayed some. Not all the time, I usually worked up in the Paint Shop. But when they needed somebody, I went down there, sprayed them as a helper. I sprayed them after I was a painter. Boxcars, cabooses, and everything else, you name it, I done it.

Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship wasn't so long but it was the time it took to get it. I was the youngest apprentice and every time they laid off some painters, well they would lay off one apprentice. I was always the first guy that got off. Maybe two or three apprentices if they laid off enough men. Now, you had to wait until they went back to work before you got called back. A time or two I called back extra as a helper and worked a little bit. But most of the time, I was off and I did other things, like going out and mowing grass and cleaning windows, and hanging paper, and I just about did anything I could do to make a buck. But when they called me back I would go back. It took me in the neighborhood of twelve or thirteen years to get it all in. I finally got my letter of indenture.

Then, of course, I was on the roster as a painter. Because I was the youngest painter I worked freight. That's the tail end of everything. I worked in the North Yards and painted boxcars and underframes, etc., just the general dirty work around the joint. Maybe go down to the Engine House and paint brakes or whatever was around there that had to be painted. They would send boxcars down there and I'd go down and climb them and paint them at night or sometimes in the daytime. I worked nights most of the time in the Coach Shop after I was a painter, spraying coaches or diesels or whatever they had to do. They would give you a list of whatever you had to do. I was working by myself, except Paul Ploense was my helper most of the time. He was working with me but a lot of times he was working somewhere else, so I was working by myself. In other words, I was the only painter working at night when I was doing that. I worked at that and I got laid

off a few times.

I believe it was about '37 they sent some of us up to Chicago. I had a brother John (Pug), he worked up there and lived up there. Morris Poling retired up there. Me and Harvey Miller went up there and worked as helpers. After that, then Bert McGuire and two or three others of us went down to St. Louis and worked down there. We were working as car cleaners, we wasn't working as painters, but you worked at what you could get a job in. If you wanted to work at something you would just go down there and come home. They would give you passes back. That's about the way it went. I guess I did about everything there was. I worked on engines a few times, and diesels when they came in. They were pretty hot to work on. They were pretty hot inside; they kept them running most of the time.

Working

If you were spraying, you did it by yourself. A passenger train was three colors. You done one of them . . . you done the center, like today, then you masked it tomorrow, then you sprayed the top and then you sprayed the bottom. That was coaches. That was the steel coaches. After you painted them with enamel you sprayed them. When they were brushing them it was all done by hand. Flat colors, then we put gold letters on them and then after that was done they varnished them. But of course you built the bodies up before that was done with surfacers and rubbed them out smooth. Prior to that they were wood. Coaches, and they had beaded wood, you know, you have seen pictures of them. They were small. Not big like these others but they were made of wood. The carpenters worked them all over and reset the nails and planed them and—then you climbed them, you surfaced them several coats. Then you would rub them out with stone—stone is what we used to start with. Later years they gave us sandpaper on blocks to rub them with. Wasn't supposed to cut through the wood, you know, you had to be pretty careful. You rubbed the rivets with stone, and you got one that had a hole wore in it through the rivet, why you kept that stone, you just carried them with you, rubbed where you wanted it. You just pushed it in and out and rubbed the rivets, that way. You weren't supposed to get a circle on them, either, had to rub them without getting a circle on them . . .

the boss didn't like it if you did. Then you had to rub them out by hand. But they done a nice job on them. Anything that they did, for that matter.

Of course, in the west end at the Paint Shop there was nickel platers. There was a guy that did all the nickel plating down there. Another one put baked enamel on chairs, etc. and cleaned them all out and done them all over new. I think Pete Tully done that. And he's dead and gone many years. Emil DesChamps was the one that did the nickel plating. He was a Frenchman. They all lived right around the Shops there. And they were particular men—they didn't want no fooling around. And of course, Ed Seamon was assistant foreman. Mr. Whittington was the master painter and then they had other foremans over in the Back Shop. They had a lot of painters all over the shop at one time.

Finishing a Coach

From start to finish—that might take a month. Because the carpenters had to work it first, then they'd prime them and then surface them, and then they rubbed them out. Sometimes they would come in and they would clean them up and do some light repair on them and touch them up and putty them and rub the putty out. If they had a hole dug in them, why, you would fill that in until it got hard over several days, then you would rub that out smooth. Then go ahead and paint them. If they done it from scratch it took quite a long while. See, when they came in they would strip the coaches—take the windows out, pipes out and seats out and they all went to the Upholstery Shop and were rebuilt. The carpenters rebuilt what would have to be rebuilt . . . then they would come back and they put them all together. Brought them into the Paint Shop and they done them inside and out. They used to do all that—by hand, striping them and corners and things like that. I got a couple of corners out there in the shed, I think. In my striping box.

In my tool box. Striping tools. A lot of them you made and a lot of them you bought already made. You formed them to the size you wanted them in vasoline and you kept them that way, each man had his own, took care of his own bucket. That was required. If you went to do something like that you took your own tools. And when you were doing brush work you had your own brushkeepers.

You had to keep them clean so there was no dust or anything in them because the ole boss didn't like any dust or anything in them. They had to be kept perfectly clean.

I wasn't no artist. I just helped stripe and letter the cars. It took time, but I wasn't no artist. They had a couple artists. They had one guy that was an artist and he made the patterns that were out there. Some beer company down in Springfield wanted two white refrigerator cars built and wanted peacocks and a lot of fancy lettering on them. They hired this guy to come from New York and he worked there and made those patterns to start with, years before we ever heard tell of him. You know, I wasn't even there, why after I was working there he was doing about like I did—him and another old guy painted kitchens. I was one of them who used to clean them up. Me and Fred McGuire used to go in there and wash them and clean them and they'd come in and paint them by hand with brushes . . . trim, etc. We never thought anything about it, everybody just thought he was an ordinary painter. So one day I found a little piece about him, I've got it around here somewhere. He was an artist from New York. He was brought here by the company to decorate these ice cars and beer cars. And he made those stencils of the peacocks and stuff and put them on. He done them all.

They were all different colors and all and he got up there and did them. Later years, Henry Wyzeski did all that, he was a master painter too. Henry was really good and so was Bud Fisher for that matter. Bud is still living. They mostly did all the pattern making and stuff like that. Later on my brother learned part of that. I did a little bit, most of the time I worked out in freight, you know, 'cause I was the youngest man. Herman was originally an artist. They hired him to come down, he just liked the job and stayed. And you wouldn't have never known who he was, he never hardly said anything. We had a good bunch of work around, we hardly ever had any problems, they all played jokes on each other once in a while. And the boss went along pretty much.

We used to tease. One time when Schmelling lost a fight over there in Germany I was teasing him about it. Carl Guhlstorf asked him about it and he got mad. He chased me all around the car and ran out of wind and he had to quit chasing me—I was young then. We was always good friends, though. His (Carl Guhlstorf's) tombstone is right there—do you know where that cemetery is, out there by the City Cemetery—that flower shop—the Evergreen. Well you know right down about the middle there's a driveway that goes right through it and Carl lives in that house next to it. He made

Boxcar work was done outdoors, even in winter. November 1943. (Pantagraph photo)



his own tombstone right back of his house. You can see it if you go out there. Carl made his own. He was pretty good—Carl was. Oh, we had a pretty good bunch. I threw a big ole piece over the top of the car one time and he came down and wrapped around Henry Wyzeski's nose. He thought Harley Keeran done it. He was blaming Harley and I stood there and laughed. Finally Harley said, "You done that, didn't you, Steve?" I said, "Yeah, but he didn't catch me, did he?"

We had fun along with everything else, you know. To start with, there were girls that came around and took our time, and later on we punched a clock. I went everywhere around there. My job was just anything they gave me to do at night. That was liable to be in the Mill, Engine House, or Steel Shop or out in the North Yards. You name it and I was liable to be there. 'Cause I was the only one working nights, outside of when Paul was helping me.

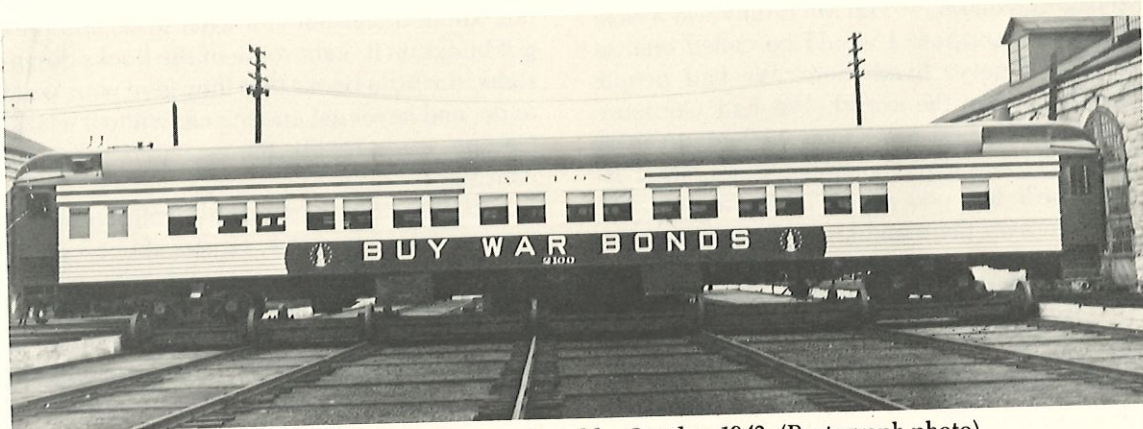
I had a little two-burner stove that I used to cook my supper on while I was still working. When I would get done with when I was working. I didn't stop when you were spraying a car, you went ahead and finished what you were doing before you quit. Sometimes it would be 9:30 or 10:30 before I would get done and then I would wash up and eat my supper. Then if you didn't have anything else to do you went over and rubbed putty the rest of the night. But they would always have plenty for you to do. But you done your main job, first. That's the way I worked there. One of the bosses didn't like my cooking supper. He is still living but he wasn't a bad boss. He was just one of those guys who liked to stick his nose in once in a while to let you know that he was foreman. He told me that I couldn't do that down there. And I told him that I always have and I am going to finish it now. So he said that he would see about that. So I went and talked to Mr. Penn the next day about it and he said, "You go on and do what you are doing, Steve. It's nobody's business but yours. We know what you are doing, everybody knows what you are doing, you are down there by yourself and you don't need a boss to tell you what you are doing, you know what you are doing, and when you are doing it, and you get the work done and that is what we want, and don't you worry about what anybody else thinks about it at all . . . you finish your work

and eat when you get ready . . . that is your privilege." And that is the last that I ever heard about that. I had a radio, too. I played that. Well, you are by yourself, you know. I didn't play it loud enough that you could hear it downtown. That was the Coach Shop. See, you had the Coach Shop, Paint Shop, Steel Shop and Engine House. I worked in all of them.

There were a lot of jobs that weren't very hard. For that matter they had some that were pretty tough. But I liked painting, I didn't mind painting at all. Maybe when you would have a lot of them, they would bring the wreck train in, they would strip it, you would have the whole train . . . you would do a car a day. You didn't work on anything else except the wreck train until it was done. They'd clean the shop out and the wreck train would come in and they done the whole works. They stripped it and everybody worked on it until the train was done. And it all went out together. Later on, though, they just brought in coaches one at a time and done them. And sent them back out.

During the war when the troop train was running, why they sent some of us guys on the train. I think it was me and my brother and Bud Fisher and Rudy Pearson and the boss and might have been more, I am not sure. We would get on the train and ride it to Chicago, and while it was in the station we would get out and letter and stripe on it, work on it and then we would get on it and ride it back to St. Louis and get out in St. Louis and work in the yards on it there. Because they didn't want to take it out of service. Then we would come back home and stay home. It didn't take too awful long. Then of course, we were back in the shop working again. But that is the way they kept the train running and they didn't pull it out of service.

Then they made the Bond Car. You've seen the pictures of that. They just stripped the car down and redone it inside and out. Painted it. Of course, they had some repairs on it, but the painters don't do the repairs. The coach carmen notify that they've done the car and then they bring it in to get it painted. Then they put the letters, etc. on it. I think there was a baggage car on the front of the train . . . war bonds you know. They just went from Chicago to St. Louis and back. Or Kansas City and



The "War Bond" car on the transfer table, October 1942. (Pantagraph photo)

back. But the Bond Car was on there. Oh, I suppose they sent it different places at other times, I don't really know. But that's what it was doing.

I sprayed what they called "Lucas" and it's full of asbestos. It's a tar paint that they put underneath boxcars. It's got all kinds of asbestos in it. I would spray with that, I would get it in my nose; I would wear a mask but that wouldn't keep me from getting it in. But it didn't kill me yet. It sure used to stink though. Ha! I washed my face in gasoline to get it all off. Then wash with soap and water. I got a pretty good complexion through it all. Ha!

They had a grocery store up in the north end—in the North Yard across the tracks there. Humpback Bridge is over there . . . you could go over there and get ice cream if you wanted, something like that . . . then I guess you could get sandwiches, too, if you wanted it. But I never bought nothing, I always carried my lunch. Sometimes if I was up there working that way and I got a chance, I would get a bottle of pop or something but usually I was busy, and didn't bother with it. We had ice coolers, anyway, and later on in years, we had regular coolers like they got now. They used to go down to the Storeroom and get the ice to put in them and you could put your milk in the ice, and you had cold milk at noon and stuff like that. I used to do that.

Bob Howe's boy, the superintendent's boy, used to push the milk wagon around. He would sell you bottles of milk. They haven't done that for a long time. Everybody used to get milk . . . chocolate milk, grape milk. We had one guy laid off, Howard Scoffield, and he could see the idea of getting box lunches and bringing them down there and selling

them. And he done that for a long time. Guys used to buy them off of him and he made a fair living out of it for a long time when he was laid off. Of course, when he got back to work, he didn't. When he was laid off, guys bought them so he could eat, you know. A lot of things like that they used to do.

Then they had the restaurant down there, the hotel on Chestnut Street. They used to have a hotel and restaurant there for years. Everybody used to go in there and eat at noon. I think they tore it down. On the other side they had a little restaurant there, for years afterward. That was there not too long ago, I think. Well, it was still there when I was working. I used to go up there and get something to eat once in a while. After that I guess they tore it down later. After I left, I don't know when it was. They tore it down and changed the tracks down in there and they cut off different jobs and stuff. I would say it's been in the last fifteen years when they done away with it. It was still there when I left.

A subway ran across Chestnut Street under the tracks. It's closed now, I think. Stairway going down from the middle of the tracks and you went down and came out either side. You didn't have to cross the tracks. Men came in from both ways on Chestnut Street and up in the middle. Went down past the Steel Shop, and Paint Shop and all down in there where the Shops were. You could come in over there where the credit union is now, too. You could come in from the North Yard over the Humpback Bridge, too. You had about six ways you could get in there.

Ethnic Make-Up

They had Polish, Italian, Irish, might say Ken-

tuckians, you know. Ha! My family was a Kentuckian, I suppose I would be called one; of course, I never lived there. We had people from all over the world. We had Germans. Some of the best mechanics we had out there were all foreigners. Kauffman, Pug's father-in-law, he'll tell you what his name was. He worked over there and his uncle was a pattern maker, he made every piece on an engine out of wood and made it perfect. And then they took it over to the Foundry and they used that to make the mold for the pieces of the engine. The Cabinet Shop out there made every piece of an engine. They didn't order it built someplace else. They made it there and built them. All different classifications of them. You couldn't say there was any one group of people done it all. You had Germans and Irish, and Polish and English, etc. We had an Englishman there called "Dr. Iodine," all he ever done was patch your finger when you scratched it. Ha! He was with the Red Cross, later on. He was a helper. We just called him "Dr. Iodine." Ha! That's all he did.

Diesels

Diesels came in while I was here. I knew they were darn hot to work in. First one they had down here, they sent us guys over to wash them and clean them up on top and boy, they would run all the time you know, they never shut them off. They would run a million, two million miles you know. If they shut them off all the water would get down in the cylinders, so they don't shut them off . . . once they start them. They run them while you are working on them. You had to drain them. And they're pretty HOT up at the top. But if you have to do it, you have to do it, you know.

They (the paints) were enamel, we sprayed all that stuff. It's a V-E-R, something like that, I don't remember how they did spell it. You'll just have to guess at it. We worked on them (diesels). When they needed painting somebody painted them. My brother Frank painted on them a lot. He was a painter then. I worked on them helping him. When you are an apprentice, you work on everything.

Safety

If you paid attention to what they told you it wasn't dangerous. You know, they had a safety committee around there and you were supposed to go to meetings once a month. They'd

talk about it and tell you what to do and they got books on it. I got some of the books downstairs, the little books that they give you. What to do, and never get under a car without a jack. Certain ways to lift things without hurting your back.

And then they had safety chairman and I was one for a long time, I guess about 5 years. If you seen them doing something wrong you went up and told them about it, whether they liked it or not. They usually didn't care, laugh about it. Sometimes you did things without thinking about it and sometimes you get hurt. I never did get hurt. They used to say if you never get hurt—you never do nothing. Ha! But I've done plenty, I've hung by my legs in the dirt . . . painting 30 or 40 feet off the ground . . . I never got hurt but I reckon I knew what I was doing. But scaffolds—I was always particular about scaffolds being right before I got on them. Because when you go to walk on them you don't watch where they are at, you just walk on them, especially if you are spraying, you are watching what you are doing. So the scaffold has to be right when you start. Most of them knew—some guys got hurt once in a while.

I was working on a coach in the Coach House one time. A couple of guys were taking a diaphragm off the engine, they got big springs in them, that's them things that bump together. I am trying to think of the guy's name, I know it—Carl Hoffman was with him, and Louie Vesiuio, I believe it was. They were all Catholics. When they took that bolt off there, the diaphragm came off and hit Vesiuio and knocked him on the concrete floor and killed him immediately. It happened within 15 feet of me. Of course, they called the priest before they called anybody else. But I worked around them all the time and they were always pretty careful. But I could never figure out, how come they did that, first, you know. Usually they took them loose at the bottom, first. Anyhow, that was loose from the bottom and they took that off from the top and it just jumped off for some reason and nobody ever did know just how it happened. But it killed him.

Work Whistle

We had the three minute whistle . . . you had to be on the job in three minutes. And that was

a must. Then they had the 1 o'clock whistle, you had the 12 o'clock whistle, the 12:30 whistle . . . you could set your watch by it. The little whistle was the fire whistle, it was real shrill. But that big whistle on the shop was the big whistle, I think Elzie told me it took 3,000 pounds of steam to blow that thing. You could hear that any place. That was just like a fog horn on a ship. You could hear that here, easy, no problem hearing that out here.

It went 7 and noon and 1 and 3:30 or whatever quitting hours they had. That's when they blowed it; they didn't blow it any other time; except the fire whistle. They blowed the little whistle and everybody ran out and grabbed their hose. One time they brought it out and it was all full of holes. Ha, ha! They had their own Fire Department out there. Guys ran and got the hoses while the City Fire Department was getting there. They went by one, two, three, and four, you know. They usually blowed the whistle "toot toot" or "toot toot toot", you know, like that. You knew where it was. They would blow the whistle and then they would give you the location. And everybody would run for there with their carts. They had two-wheel carts they used to drive around in. Of course everybody would quit and run to the window to see where it was.

The railroad paid more than anybody. That was the best job in Bloomington. If you worked for the railroad, you had it made. I had a picture of me and John and my brother some place in there. In three powder-blue suits, we went up to Mat's Clothing Store there and bought them on time. Hat, suit, shoes, all powder-blue for Easter. Snowed all day! Ha, ha! We got on the streetcar, you know it had those boards on them in the summertime, you'd get on there and ride out to the park you know, and fool around, that's all you had to do. Nobody had any cars. When we went to work there the bosses had a car and in the wintertime they put them up on blocks—they didn't run them, you know. You walked to work. We walked everywhere. We went up-town and would ride the streetcar—that was a big deal—riding the streetcars.

Mat's—you know where that new building is, right across from the National Bank, I guess it is, there on Center Street, Center and Washington—the northwest corner . . . a cigar store was on the corner and right next to it was Mat's Clothing Store. He was a Jew. Everybody

bought clothes from Mat. He would sell you anything on time. That was the first full suit of clothes I had. I had never owned a suit before.

Union Involvement

The Storeroom had their own union. Carmen had their union. The only time we ever got together or anything was when it came down to a strike. Normally, me and my brother would represent the whole bunch of them. You had to have one control outfit, which didn't amount to much. If there is a drunk come to work, I want to take you home. I don't want a drunk on the place. They always make trouble and there ain't no sense in any trouble.

When I went there most of the offices was held by one group and later on by another group. They used to squabble among each other, but that's like politics, you know. They didn't hate each other, they were all friends, and they all played jokes on each other. Finally, me and my brother both got into office there and we got along with everybody. We was in there a long time. We didn't have anything to fight over. We had Christmas parties and one time we had a dance out here and paid for the hall out here and had the band out here. I had a picnic out here at home, I have pictures. We had a Coca-Cola thing set up out here and had some ponies here and the kids were riding them. The Jew's wife rode the pony and it took three of them to get her up on it. Ha! She was a great big woman. Ha, ha!

Our general vice president come to visit. Like when we had those parties they used to come down to the party. Well, it might be from Chicago or Kansas City or St. Louis. And they would come to our meetings sometimes, too. Usually it was just Schnelling, he was the general chairman from the Grand Lodge, see. He had others come too. Ivan has pictures of two conventions he went to, all their names is on the back. Oh, yeah, they've been here. At different meetings, especially when we had Christmas parties. Gibbons couldn't understand how we could put on one of those parties like that, with no more money than we had. "Well," Roy said, "we don't spend the lodge money. The boys go out and get it". That was me and Pug. We went out to the different stores, we got the bakery down here on Locust Street, got him to cook the hams and turkey. Of course one of them came and cut them up, put them on a platter and we served them tur-

key dinners, for about 1,500. Men, women, and kids; we didn't allow no drinking, however. Some of them didn't like it at first, the women liked it. It was at the Legion Hall. Right there by where they built the viaduct. Everybody went over there when they had that. All the lodges met there and everything. They had a big stage and we had a show on the stage. Hometowners or someone else.

We would have a band. Some of the guys doing stuff, you know. One guy, he was the griever for the outside union, but his dad was with the Carmen. Him and his wife used to do a "nigger dance." And I am telling you they was a "scream." Ha ha!

All kinds of tricks, etc., and they could really cut up, you know. One of them kind that everyone likes to watch. But I can't think of their names, their names get away from you in twenty years. Pug can tell you, I know that he will remember.

I called all the meetings and done the usual things that a president does. Controlled and done the meetings, and whatever was done I appointed men to do it. Things like that. If we had a party coming up, why, we would all get busy and get something from the stores uptown and we would have a Christmas party and things like that—once a year for all the members. We didn't allow any drinking, however. That was a no-no at Christmas parties 'cause the women and kids were all there, and we had a nice one.

And once in a while we would have to meet on some kind of a situation that arose around the Shops. We would have the chairman there and all the different ones involved . . . talk about it and then we would talk to the general chairman about the situation and of course, if it was bad enough and he couldn't get it settled . . . then he would go down to Kansas City and talk to the powers-that-be, and then we would generally settle things without any problem. Anything around the shop was generally settled by just talking to the boss. Not too much controversy going on.

Except one time they were raising quite a fuss around there with different ones going out working other shops and couple, three of them didn't feel like the guys ought to be entitled to do that—they shouldn't do that—they didn't have no right to do that. Of course, I was one of them involved, because I hung paper and

painted and everything like that when I was laid off—I couldn't eat without working. And neither could my brothers. So we made a living at it besides working at the Shops, along with a lot of other men who were doing all kinds of things . . . wasn't getting very much wages then anyway. Things were getting a little higher.

Anyway, there was quite a ruckus down there so I went over and got my brother and my books from the lodge and some data I had on the stuff, got in the car and my wife and him and we went to Kansas City to see the president of the Railway Carmen. We went down and asked for an audience and he give it to us. We went in there and we talked to him about the different things and about them working outside. I told him that as far as I am concerned, as long as the men came to work every morning and were on the job at three minutes 'til 7 and worked their eight hours a day, five days a week—I don't think the company or anybody else has got anything to say about what they do otherwise. I said, "They got to work to make something to eat and they ain't getting enough to eat anyway. Half of them is getting garnisheed down there because they can't pay their bills—they get laid off and come back . . . they don't get any overtime." I said, "It is hard to get by." And I said, "That is why they are working . . . I work too, and I am going to keep on doing it," and I showed him the books and everything I wrote up on it.

He said, "Well, I'll have to agree with you. It's a fact that it's your right to do as you please after you've done the hours that you're supposed to for the railroad; it's nobody's business what you do. It is none of ours, that is for sure."

He said, "Birchfield is going to ask for a raise in pay and I think he is going to ask for five or six cents and I said, "Well, if you ain't going to ask for any more than that, don't ask at all. We don't want it. Everytime you get one of them small raises, when you get done raising your dues and everybody else we are short another nickel. If you can't get a quarter, don't get anything. And that won't give us about maybe a nickel or 7¢. But that will be better than nothing!" "Well," he said, "I never thought of it that way." He had never looked at it that way, he had his secretary come in and check up on it and he said, "By Golly, you know you are

right!”

We were in there quite a while—there wasn’t nobody else around. And he called Birchfield on the voicebox there or whatever it was—phone—or whatever and told him that when he went in this morning to ask for a quarter or strike! And I guess he did because we got the quarter.

I understood later that Birchfield came out of the meeting—he either dropped dead or died right after that, with a heart attack. My brother might remember when it was, I don’t know, I imagine he would. But I heard that, I think Schnelling told me that. He’s dead now. Slim is dead now and all these other guys are all dead. You know, we are all getting old. Things like that happened, and of course we never had no problems about that after that. There were a few around there that were squawkin’ but it never did any good anyway, they never did nothin’ anyway but they were yellin’ and jealous of somebody else doing things, you know . . . and making a few bucks and that was the whole thing. I don’t think anybody else was making any stink; I know no foreman wasn’t. I would work for the bosses half the time. I used to go over and wash the boss’s kitchen and wash the windows and trim the hedge and mow their grass for a lot of them. So did Fred McGuire, and there were a lot of them around there that went over and worked for the bosses. They paid us, we weren’t paid by the railroad but we went over there after hours and worked for them. And why not?

Outside Jobs

I hung paper all the way from about 20¢ a roll to a half dollar, depending on what the paper was and what the times was. Me and Frank and Fisher went down (oh, I better not tell who it was) to Funk’s Grove and hung paper and we got home with \$2.00 apiece for a day’s work, but it was better than nothing. And of course we done things like that. But we always ended up and got pretty good wages. I done a lot of work. I worked in a lot of the houses. Making \$1.00 or \$1.50 or \$2.00 an hour you were doing pretty good. We didn’t complain—had eatin’ money. Everybody else had to, too. There wasn’t nothing going on. You were lucky to have a job! I done a lot of work for the Wesleyan, I worked in a lot of little towns

around. I had a little ole truck that I bought. When I first started hanging paper I had a two-wheel cart. If I got a job I would put it on the cart. It would take me a half day to get there. Maybe it would take me a whole day to get the job done, but later I got that little truck. We worked around at different places. We made a half-way living at it.

We got one of the first ads with WJBC. We got quite a lot of work out of that. And when we weren’t working at the Shops, why, that’s the way we made our living. You had to work somewhere. And that is what we did. We painted houses, and whatever. Hung paper a lot.

We were all coach painters for the railroad and we all hung paper and painted too, when we wasn’t doing nothing else. I did a lot of work for F.A. Tate. Wayne Townley’s dad, judge you know, I worked for his dad. Oscar Hall, he was a lawyer, I did a lot of work for his dad. Of course, there was a lot of in-betweens there and a lot of rough going and all that but it paid us to stay. We made a living.

It was better than running around hunting a job. Of course, when we went back the last time we had a good business and we debated whether to go back or stay with what we were doing. I said, “Well we got all them years in, it’s kinda foolish to throw them away. We won’t get no pension out of it, much, here.” So we went back. And of course we got laid off a few times after that. Frank never did, I don’t believe, ’cause a few years later he died. He knew he was going to die. He was doing that Evangelical Church down there, you know where that is. Lee Street and Front Street. Well, we done that inside a couple times, my brother went there. We had the kitchen to finish and he was going to California to see his son, he said if he didn’t go he would never get to see him again. He got on the train. He wasn’t going to get on there until he helped us finish the kitchen. We told him to go ahead and get ready but he said no, he was going to help us finish the job. So we finished it and he went down there, and he was down there one day and Bud went to work at the base and he had a headache and he told Florence to go get him an aspirin. When she came back he was dead. So they sent him home by train and I met him in Kansas City and brought him home. He was 52 when he died.

Wife Working

She was a cashier for Eureka-Williams restaurant. And she was cashier there and she retired at 62.

She raised the boys first. Then she went to work. The first time she went to work was when Montgomery Ward had an office down here from Chicago, so they could get help cheaper. Somebody told me that she was working up there, in that building where they got their rooms now, I think. I said, "My wife ain't working nowhere." "Oh yes, she is," they said. And I went up there and there she was, the first day. I said, "What the hell you doing up here?" She said, "I'm working." I said, "You just think you are, you get your *** out of here." The guy sitting there said, "Who do you think you are?" And I said, "I'm her husband, and you keep your *** mouth shut! My wife don't work for you or anybody else—she gets her *** home where she belongs!" And he shut up. I was mad! I said, "I make enough to keep you, you don't have to work." And I did. I was working for the railroad and I made pretty good money and I hung paper too. How much more do they want? So she went home. So she went home, never said a word—just got up and walked out. So later on then, she got a job out here at Eureka.

She wanted to buy a car. So she went to work out there. She was making pretty good money. So she bought a Buick . . . second hand. It took all her check to pay on the car. In about two or three months she said, "I don't have any money left!" "Well," I said, "Are you tired of buying things on time now?" I never let her buy anything on time, you know, that was a no-no with me. If you ain't got it you do without; if you have to eat a half loaf of bread—that's what you eat! So I went down and paid it off and there were no more cars on time. Mr. Hubert's grocery, that's down there on Jefferson, he's still living and he can verify it. We traded there all the time . . . that Tudor who lives there, his girls are teachers now, but he moved in there—Bob Tudor, I didn't know him. Anyway, he ran a grocery bill there and I didn't know it. He kept charging it to me and I went down there one time to pay my bill and it took all I made at the railroad and hanging paper to pay my bill. Ha, ha! "My God," I said, "Mr. Hubert, that's enough of that, don't sell my wife or kids another damn thing!" I went

home and I had \$3.00. I told my wife that I went down there to pay the bill and I had never seen such a bill in my life. "What in the hell did you do to get it! No more groceries," I told her. "I don't owe him a dime. We are going downtown and get a bag of beans, some lard and some flour. And we are going to live just like we did when we didn't have anything until we get another payday." And we never bought another thing on time from that day on! But we found out later that I was paying his grocery bill.

Living in Chicago

We were laid off down here and the company let us go up there and work. If there had been work we would have been back in Bloomington. Pug worked up there for three or four years. He lived down there, I think he lived where the Polish was. Yeah, there were Polacks where he was and there were Italians where I was. They would have big parties down there when they were getting married and they would get to dancing and they would end up naked out in the street, raising hell you know, 'till 3 or 4 o'clock . . . 'till the paddy wagon would get out and get them, and those big ole women would whip the cops. Ha, ha! They would get them in there and keep them overnight and then let them go home. Ha, ha! They robbed Harvey Miller up there. Twice. He stayed in a hotel.

He moved out of that other place where the gangsters was. Me and Morris rented a place where me and my wife planned to live. Morris, he was buried out here a couple years ago. They blowed that place up . . . they were making beer in the basement, we didn't know it, they blowed it up and burnt it down after we moved. Well, there's one thing I want you to know. We took all the kids uptown to the Chicago Theater, we had never seen a big show. And we all went in there and that was the first time that Lawrence Welk went on bigtime. And he was on the Chicago Theater that night with Joe E. Brown and the Harmonica Cats and Big-Mouth Brown. That was the first time I ever heard Lawrence Welk, I tried to get my wife to tell him but she wouldn't do it. We've listened to him all those years. and I just loved those damn little guys the Harmonica Cats. I got records of them downstairs. We got records of all the honky tonk—probably got 150 to 200

records downstairs and they are all nice ones. We've got originals from Presley and all of them and got a lot of old ones.

Well, when me and my wife moved up to Chicago, we moved up there and put the kids in school up there. We rented an apartment up there. Of course, me and the boys batched up there, a bunch of us, you know, and there was a gangster above us and we didn't know it. They came up there with machine guns, the police station was a block from us, and one guy kicked the door in one night and wanted to know if Bill was there. "No, there's no Bill here." "Sorry, boys, I'll have a guy watch the door all night." And a guy stood there and watched the door all night and we went on to sleep. Ha! They come and put the door up the next day.

Well, when me and my wife moved up there, the landlady told her, "Now Mrs. Tudor, when you throw your garbage away, try to wrap it separate because there will be somebody down there and pick it up." My wife said, "Well, what for?" And she said, "Why to eat, of course." Mom couldn't hardly believe that you know, but it turned out to be a fact. So she'd leave a little meat on the bones and if she had potatoes or something she would wrap it separately and take it down there and there would be guys there and sometimes women would come and get it. I think it was '38, we lived there in '38 and right around the corner was a Catholic school. On down there quite a ways Al Capone had a soup kitchen. Now, he was an ornery son of a bitch, but a lot of people ate down there.

Houses

1210 North Linden. I lived there when the boys was real little. First I lived in that little house next to the colored church on Lee and Oakland and they tore it down the other day to make a parking lot. I lived in there and I rented that. That's when I first got out of the Army. Then we went from there to North Linden Street. After it burnt I rented a house on McLean Street, I lived there for quite a while. Some time along in there I bought 1210 North Linden . . . from a man who ran a grocery store on West Washington . . . Davy

Lewis, I believe his name was. I paid by the month on it. It burnt down on the twelfth of March; we had a foot of snow. Then that is when I went and rented the one on Jackson. Then when I left there I bought Mulberry Street at a sale—F. A. Tate was selling it, the auctioneer—he was selling it and the one next door for some estate. Dean Harris bought the one next door.

I bought 623 East Mulberry. We cleaned it up and moved in later. There was a guy living there at the time. I built a kitchen on it and front porch. Before I did that some woman came around the corner and tore the porch off with her car. Didn't get nothing for it. You didn't think about things like that back then. Yeah, I just rebuilt it—just like it is now. Those windows are made out of water tanks—cedar from water tanks. They won't rot; the guy that lives there don't know it. I sold it and then that guy sold it to the guy that lives there now.

I built out here. I built this out of boxcars—lumber from boxcars. I bought them from the company for so much a load. Hauled it out here and cleaned the nails out and I had that old tractor I bought. It's all wood, there ain't no tar paper in it. It's got $\frac{3}{4}$ by 5 inch siding.

Retirement

Yeah, we made a decent living and that is about all anybody else does. We got a decent pension . . . but they took it away from us. We don't get much now. If I didn't have a little money saved I would have to sell. I couldn't live. There is taxes, on the first half is \$400 and it's going to be more this time. On the trailer down there the taxes are \$65 a year. And the light bill year-round is \$12 a month. So I'll probably have to get rid of that. Out there by the lake. I got a boat and everything down there. I got one out here but it is getting rotten; that could be fixed though. We never seemed to get to do anything ourselves, we were always getting it ready for somebody else. Oh, we had a pretty good life together but ever since they ruined the pension my wife went downhill. That just broke her heart. To lose her pension, she worked eleven and a half years for that.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte

John Ivan Tudor

John "Pug" Tudor, and his twin brother Stephen were both born in rural Beason on March 3, 1905. Both worked as painters in the Shops, Stephen starting first, John beginning work in 1926, first as a painter's helper, and then eventually completing his apprenticeship as a full painter.

His time on the railroad spanned the era from wooden cars, which were hand-painted and varnished, to the era of steel cars and diesels.

A socially involved individual, John served in various offices, including chairman, of the "Red Hummer" Lodge of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen, and was also active in church affairs.

Childhood

I went to Atlanta public school. I went to the eighth grade. Then, I went to work. There were times when we weren't in school and we would go to work doing different things for practically nothing, compared to what it would be now. They would have one of us kids drive the horses that were hauling the straw. We would get maybe twenty-five or fifty cents for doing that. Well, once in awhile they would want us to do it in the wintertime and Mom would let us go. As long as we didn't have any problems with our lessons Mom would let us go. I never had any problems at all at school.

Apprenticeship

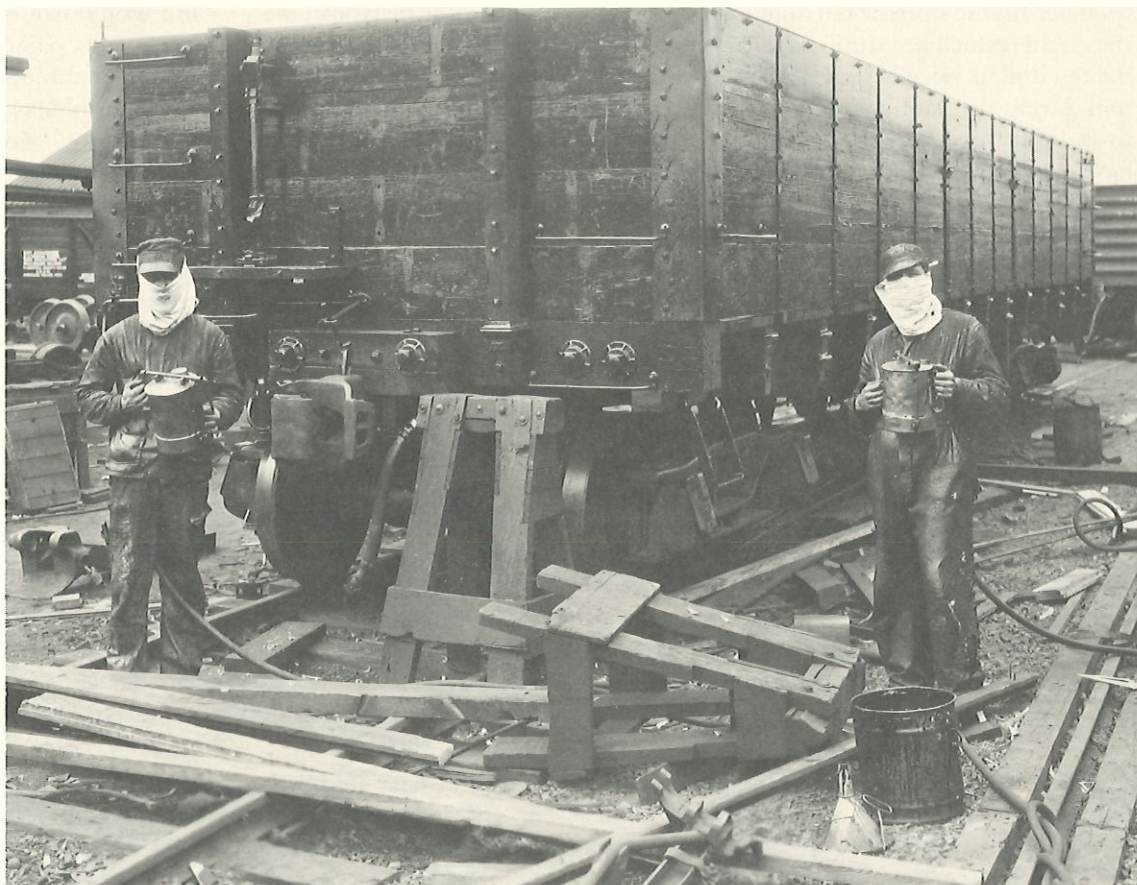
It was 1926 and I started out as a painter's helper. At that time you did a lot of jobs, but later on you were defined as a painter. We rubbed putty and things like that. At that time helpers could do that. That job paid forty-nine cents an hour to start with and later on it was raised to fifty-five cents, which wasn't too bad. The painter's helpers would wash and scrub the coaches or whatever was to be done.

I worked as a painter's helper for two years. Then, they put me on as a helper apprentice. A helper apprentice had to serve three years, where a regular apprentice had to serve four years. The helper apprentice started out at

helper's wages for the first six months where the apprentice would get maybe thirty-five or thirty-six cents an hour. Very low wages.

At one time at the shop they had 150 apprentices at the shop. The man that taught us, his name was Valentine. I don't remember his first name. He was from the International Correspondence School. Anybody that finished there could take any courses they wanted to while they were still there. I got my regular courses for the painter done in no time. You had to do these lessons and then send it to them. Well, I worked there. It was only a couple of months and I had mine all done. I wanted to take some business courses. There were some kids that didn't want to do their school work. They wouldn't do their lessons.

When I was an apprentice, the boss his name was Mr. Whittington. He was the master painter, the painter foreman. He assigned Joe Gang to show me how to varnish a coach. That man took his pot of varnish and we were using this round varnish brush at that time and he took so much varnish on this panel. I was amazed. I said, "Joe, you are going to have it running all over." He told me to be quiet because he was showing me what to do. He put that varnish on there and he crossed it off and laid it up and down. I am telling you that I looked at that



Early freight car spray-painting, c. 1930. (Pantagraph photo)

paint half of a day to see where the running was going to be and there never was a run in it. He sure taught me a lesson.

After a bit you realize that everybody is on your side. You do the best you can. If you do wrong they will straighten you out. It took me two years as a helper and three years as a painter.

One thing I got to do when I was in Chicago was go to the World's Fair to work on an engine. They had this engine on display and I was one of the ones to be picked to go over there and help clean this up. They had some regular men that did work there every day. Well, when someone was off every couple of days I would go over there. That was a good experience.

We went to the Fair ourselves and would see a lot. I can't remember what it was exactly like. They had a new ride there that was a humdinger. It took you up to the top and you sat in the seat and it took you down. I mean, it spun around and it would pull you against the wall, it went so fast.

They had a lot of displays there and they were foreign. I can't remember what they all were. We went out there several times. My sister lived out there. We would go to their house lots of times and go places with them. We went to the Fair with them a couple of times.

Depression

I lived at 303 South Western before I was married. Then I lived at 103 West Packard Street after I got married. I lived in Chicago for three years. That was about 1932 I think. I was working as a coach cleaner at that time. When I went up there I got paid forty-four cents an hour. I hadn't worked more than a month and they cut it to thirty-nine cents an hour. I worked there just about three years at thirty-nine cents an hour. During the Depression that was king, to get thirty-nine cents an hour. I was living with some friends of ours. They had four children and we had one. We rented an apartment. It was a basement apartment. Above the apartment was a store. This women

tried her best to borrow ten dollars from me so she could restock her store. I didn't borrow her the ten dollars because we were in a bad position during the Depression. I was so fortunate to be able to live there three years without having to go on relief or anything like that.

Then, I got called back to work about 1935 or 1936. I didn't work very long and I was living there at 901 West Jefferson. I hadn't lived there very long, maybe four months, and I got laid off again. I went back to Chicago and I worked there for three or four months. I was having a problem with one of my legs so I came back home and just quit. In the next six months I went on relief. During that time I worked at the foundry on Oakland for a dollar and ten cents an hour for a short while and then I got called back to the Shops.

I was living on West Jefferson at the time. From there we moved to 306 South Western Avenue. I lived there until 1937 and I bought the house I am living in now. This house is 309 South Western.

If you worked at the railroad you could go and buy anything on credit. Even if you weren't making a lot of money they still thought you were good because you worked at the railroad. On the other hand, if you were laid off from the railroad and wanted to get a job someplace it was real hard. People wouldn't even talk to you about it. I always went back when they called because that was the only way you could hold your seniority.

Layoffs

I painted and I hung paper. We did that when we were laid off. Me and my brother Steve Tudor and my half brother Frank Shifflet. We had our own business. We would do other work after we got done working at the shop. We had a pretty good business and at one time we had eight men working. Sometimes we would all be working after work and sometimes we would have to work that out if some of us was working. We would go back to work at the railroad and save our other work until after work at the railroad.

Railroad Years

It was all wood. Inside and out. They did have steel underframes. Later on, some of these old wooden cars had steel put over them. It wasn't too successful because after a while the screws

would get rusty and fall out and would cause trouble. The painters had to sand, prime, paint and put surfacer on the cars. It was a rubbing compound. At that time we used sandblocks. The coach with the more coarse stone, we would have to use a certain sandblock and it would make it slick. Then, we would have to put a seal on it.

Generally, we would reputty it and glaze it and smooth it all out again. We did everything to make them the best we could. After we had the surface all prepared they would put another sealer on top of all that. Then came the paint. At that time we weren't using spray guns. This was done all by hand.

Usually, if it was a regular-sized coach, they would put four men on. Two on each side. After you did all the painting, then came the lettering. Some of the coaches would be lettered with gold leaf and some of them with gold paint. What we called it was imitation gold. Either way after you had the lettering done you would varnish the coach. That was a pretty good job to do.

Bud Fisher could make anything. Of course, he did it so much that he could do a good job with almost nothing. I was cutting stencils before I retired. Some of those stencils were pretty big that we put on the boxcars. We did have a pattern. We had to take this heavy stencil paper and lay it out. You would lay your pattern out on your stencil paper and weight it out and take a pencil and mark it all. If you are making it from scratch you have to figure out how large you want your bars and everything like that. After you get it laid out you turn this heavy paper over and then you oil the back side of it until the oil soaks through. That makes that heavy paper pliable. Everything has a place. It was hard to make some of those things. We had two sizes of letters that would go on the coaches. One was twelve-inch letters and the other about nine inches.

We would put patterns on and put it on by hand on the engines. It had to look nice too. After a while we would put the numbers and letters on the engines in *prismo*. Prismo is a form of ground glass. You put the letters on in paint and we had a special gun that we sprayed this prismo on the letters with. By doing that the car lights would reflect on the numbers. Bud Fisher and myself did quite a bit of that. He even tried it on a coach and decided it was



Spray-painting passenger car doors and fixtures, November 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

too expensive to do it for all of the coaches. So, we just did it on the engines.

As time went on the spray guns took more and more away from the men. I can't remember exactly what year that would have been. It was probably in the Thirties. They started out slowly with the idea of the spray guns. When they found out they would work, they bought the regular spray guns. One man would spray the coach and it would take about two hours.

It wouldn't last any longer, but one advantage it had was that no brush marks would show up. It would be smoother. I think we had mostly steel cars by that time. We still had the steam engines. The steam engines would have more paint on them than the diesels did.

Well, I don't think there is anything I missed. I worked in the Paint Shop, Back Shop, Engine House, Roundhouse, over in the Tank Shop, and I worked in the North Yards stenciling cars and spraying cars, doing everything. I worked over in the Storage Department for a few months. One of the jobs I had was checking roofing. A carload of this roofing came in for the Car Department. They brought this over there—and Bob Barber—he was the gang leader. He put me in there to accept the stuff—I forget, there was four or five different kinds of stuff. And I had to stand there and check that stuff while the rest of them unloaded it.

And would you believe that I did it and didn't make any mistakes . . . that first time, and I was just a young kid and didn't know nothing. So then he wanted to make me gang leader . . . probably would have if I had stayed there.

They had messenger jobs and you delivered stuff to the different departments. Way back then they didn't have a tractor running around pulling everything. They done this stuff by hand. Even pipes—they would put some on one end of a wheelbarrow and some on the other end. Or they would take a two wheel job like a cart with two wheels and four arms and put pipes on that and take them where they wanted them to go. In the Lumber Yard they would use them for lumber. They had ropes from that two wheels out there where the men could pull them and some of them, they would have a stick on the end and them guys would get out there and pull on it, they would have a couple guys here and the back pushing on it. Boy, I tell you I don't know how they ever got by with all that stuff. They finally got a tractor. Later on they got a three wheel job. In our Car Department we had a helper assigned to run that and he saved a lot of walking. If I needed just a bolt or needed just a screw he'd go get it . . . I wouldn't have to walk.

Union Activity

When I started in 1926 there was no union. Shortly after, the men got together and talked about someone representing them and it was agreed on between our manager and the men there to appoint somebody to represent them. It wasn't actually a company union. Actually, before we had our American Federation of Labor union one of these bosses could fire somebody and there would not be any recalls. I remember there was one fellow by the name of Tom Pace, and we were in a coach washing it down. I was a helper at that time. We were washing the coach and when you get down to the bottom to the windows you drop your board down and you go down while standing on it. When you washed the coach you would sit down on this board. This Tom Pace sat there a few minutes and then he dozed off and went to sleep. The boss came in and seen him and fired him right there. That man was an old man and we had no pension then. Well, when the boss fired him it made all of those men down there mad. Tom was a real nice man and he always did his work. The boss didn't make any friends by doing that.

The painters organized our own local union. We paid about seventy-five cents a month, it seems to me it was. I think we had forty-two painters working there at that time. I don't remember how many helpers we had. It was about eight to ten helpers. We kept that local for about four or five years and then the carmen's local asked us to go in with them so that is what we did. We formed one union.

I had doorman and then I went to vice-president and then president. I was vice-chairman and chairman. These were jobs all on the committee. Another job I did when I was there was host-committeeman. The Union sent me and a fellow by the name of Francis Flynn to the Missouri Pacific Hospital to inspect it to see if our members could join the Missouri Pacific Hospital. We found it satisfactory and when we got back we recommended that our men join the Missouri Pacific. That cost the employees six dollars a month to join. That paid everything. Now, since we are retired, it is a lot higher for us now. Anyway, that was alright.

Repercussions of 1922 Strike

I saw things happen. Some of the fellows that stayed on were hated by lots of men and it

wasn't unusual to see somebody pick up a rock and throw it at them. This one guy would come through and I never saw anybody hit him, but they would throw it close enough to let him know what they thought. I never saw anybody actually hurt anybody. They might have done that a little earlier before I was around there, I don't know.

Health and Safety

Actually any job is dangerous at times to a certain extent. We would have to get up on scaffolds and they were high enough that if a board broke you could easily get hurt. Even getting up and down from the top of a ladder, it can slip and things of that sort. It was dangerous after the spraying came in because it was a hazard. Paint has a lead content and the things that go in it can be dangerous for a person. Danger from an explosion from gas or anything that you are working with is always possible. I saw one guy that got injured. That was on the end of a coach. The coach had a heavy spring in it. They take the nut off on the inside of it. There are two diaphragms that hook together. Well, this time this fellow released the spring and got knocked off of the scaffold, but it didn't hurt him. About two or three years after this it happened to another guy. Two guys were working and one fellow went and took the nut off and it has a big heavy spring. When the man took the nut off the other fellow was still up on the scaffold. The diaphragm came completely loose and it knocked this man off and it killed him. It hit him in the head when it went off and killed him. That is all I had ever seen. I never saw anyone hit by an engine or anything like that.

The only thing that we had to do is to tell them what we saw as unsafe. They always had a safety man and he went around and taught safety. He had a coach they had meetings in and he would tell all about safety. Sometimes, we would have a meeting on safety in our building. At one time our foreman had to hold a safety meeting in each department. Yes, they did make some attempt for safety. A lot of people would make fun of it.

When my half brother died, he had gone to California on a vacation. When he died they took an autopsy and they said he was full of paint. He sprayed about all his life. His name was Frank Shifflet. They had respirators that

you would put over your mouth. But, still a certain amount will get in there. By the time you did a car the capsule on the respirator would get clogged up and before you realize it you would be pushing it from your face. Well, if you passed out from those fumes you could die right there. The fumes were very powerful. It was some kind of synthetic paint. It dried quick.

Social Life

I belonged to the Eagles and the Moose. I liked to go fishing a lot, in the creeks. One of our favorite places was on the Mackinaw River. We had some friends that went to our church and had a place up there. They told us that we were welcome to go there anytime we wanted to. We could go there whether they were home or not because they knew our car and everything. Me and the wife and our grandson too. We made a lot of good friends.

Our church was the Evangelical Reformed, on Front and Lee Streets. Our group was "Come Double." That was for married people. Every month we would hold a meeting in someone's home or some place like the church. We had a lot of good friends there.

Whoever was on the committee, they would organize their thoughts and ideas. Some of them had some wonderful ideas. I was president of the Churchmen's Brotherhood. I was president of the church at one time. Many of those people are dead and gone now. We went to the church out on East Washington. Now it is St. Luke's Union Church. It is nice and the people are nice. Some of our members joined different churches.

We played volleyball at Western Avenue. We formed teams that would play. We would play basketball and baseball and different stuff like that. Our carmen one time put on a play. Me and Rudy Pierson would always pitch together.

The men got along most of the time. There were two old men and they always ate their lunch together and lay their stuff on the scaffold board. So, this one little guy, he laid his pie down and when he went to eat his pie his pie wasn't there. "Well," he says out loud,

"That was my pie." And the other guy says, "Was that your pie?" He says, "I thought that was mine and so I ate it." They were Hungarian.

At first when I went out there the place was kind of dominated by Catholics. Many of them were Catholics. Before I left there the Catholics kind of thinned out and the Masons began to dominate. Actually, as far as working there, I don't think it made any difference. Everyone would work together and they didn't usually argue about stuff like that. Not as much as you would think.

Seeger's had a store up here on the corner of Jackson and Morris Avenue. It was a good store to trade with. You wouldn't have to go to any other store. They were real nice people. We bought everything from there. Then Charlie Payne used to have one where the Red Fox is at. We went over there too. We bought most of our clothes at the West Side Clothing Store. Down on Washington Street there was two restaurants at one time. There was one on the corner and one in the middle of the block. I don't recall the names. When I got married I hung around home.

Railroad Today

Bloomington here was the largest lodge in our Union on this wheel over here. Now it's got down to where nobody belongs to it. I mean, where there is nobody left to belong to it—men who are too old or old pensioners. So they transferred all of us to the Springfield lodge.

The railroads, I think they are all doing that. They have been cutting back. In many cases they've closed the shops and if anything has to be done they have farmed it out to other people. Illinois Central has a shop up in Chicago yet. I know there is four guys from down here that when they closed down here they went to Chicago. And the four of them, each has a pretty good car and they are driving to work every day and take turns with their cars. They say it is better to do that and come home than to try and find a place up there. The rent up there is so terrible.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte

Lawrence J. Hoog

Although only employed for about ten years in the Shops, Larry Hoog has a great affection for the railroad, and was proud of his skills as a painter. With continual layoffs in the Depression, he eventually found steady work at the Williams Company, retiring from Eureka in 1973.

His story tells the pride in craftsmanship and the careful work it took to keep the railroad's "varnish"—passenger trains—shining, bright and attractive to the travelling public.

From a railroad family, Larry Hoog wants to be remembered as a "railroad man."

Childhood

He (Hoog's father) was the fireman on the locomotives at one time. He was also the foreman there at one time, I remember him telling me. When he retired he was a painter. He had all different jobs.

Oh, I remember the strike. I remember the soldiers uptown and the tents in the Courthouse. I remember and of course I was pretty small. I was up there with my mother. Everyone would be up there looking at them. My dad was on strike because he worked there at the time. My dad ran a grocery store on West Washington. He worked the Shops at the same time. He extended so much credit to people that he lost his store. It was on the corner where Eddy's Market is now. That is still there.

He would tell me about the strike. He told me about the people turning a street car over. The strikers got so violent. I think the street-car workers were also on strike at that time. They would talk about the scabs. I went to school there and the people that worked down there, we would call their kids scabs because their dads scabbed. It was hard on the kids.

When we lived on Wood Street I would walk over to Mennonite. Of course in those days it wouldn't be like it is now. Yes, if you couldn't afford a car, you would have to walk everywhere you went. People didn't have cars like they do now. We thought a car was a real luxury. You had the street cars you could ride.

You could if you had a nickel.

We would walk everywhere. And every night that we would want to go to a show, we would walk downtown, watch the show and then walk back home. We would meet a lot of people walking in those days.

We would go to the grocery store like Park Store or Lierman's. In those days there weren't any big stores like there is now, like Kroger's. It was more neighborhood stores that we would trade. They had credit. We would have credit. We would just pay every payday. Every two weeks. Twice a month. Sometimes you would get two weeks and sometimes you would get over two weeks. It was the fifteenth and the twenty-eighth I think. So, sometimes there would be two or three more days' pay.

Labor Gang

The labor gang worked in the way of hauling materials around and different things like that. For one thing that I remember real well is that we had to clean out the smoke stack in the Power House. Believe it or not, we got two carloads of soot. Oh, yes it was a dirty job.

A lot of times we had to fill the Icehouse with ice. They used that ice in refrigerator cars in them days and also used the ice for the drinking fountains to keep the water cool. Whenever somebody didn't show up for work like in the Boiler Room then, I would take their



A carpenter and painters finish a mail car interior, November 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

place. So, I worked in the Boiler Room as a helper and also a machinist's helper at different times. They had a shop mule, is what they called it. It would haul material around the shop and it had a Ford motor in it. It was about like a big tractor would be now. On the back of it they had four-wheel wagons that would be hauled around. Each wagon had different parts on them. We would leave them there and later on we would come back to pick them up. My job would be to unhook the cars and to hook more on. They had a driver and we would take parts to each locomotive. We would deliver ice and put it in the coolers and things like that.

Apprenticeship

I worked there probably about seven years. But, I don't think I ever really finished it. I lacked a little time when I finally quit. I would get laid-off and work somewhere else and then I would get called back. That was when the railroad was almost finished. I didn't want to be a painter. I wanted to be a machinist or an electrician. I had applications in two or three

places and I got the painter. I just took it.

The pay scale wasn't that different. A machinist isn't like what it used to be. In those days it was different. A regular machinist could do anything. He could work on different machines or make anything on a lathe. These people today can't because they are not really machinists. They might say they are, but what they are is machine operators. Almost anybody could be a machine operator. You know, turn the machine on and in several hours training become a machine operator. Painters went out because they came out with the sprays. When I first started down there we would paint all the coats with a handbrush. We would varnish them and all. As I left they just started spraying them.

They gave you a box down there to put your stuff in. And all the apprentices went to school here. You would go to school two hours a week. They had a big room there. It was a correspondence school for apprentices. They taught you math and drafting. Everybody took math. Drafting was required. After that we went into the painting. We would learn

about mixing different paints and different colors. The electricians, of course, had their books on electrical. We got painting books after we got through the math. That is where I learned my math. We went two hours every week. I still have my books, too. We went to that correspondence school and that was like high school. It was real tough. They taught us things we didn't learn in high school. It went beyond what you would learn in high school. I still have my drafting tools.

We worked from 7 a.m. until 12 p.m. and then from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m. I remember if you came five minutes late in the morning you would lose an hour of pay. You would get docked. Every day you got a new card. Now, you have the same card all week. If you were late you had to go to the superintendent and he would give you a dirty look.

Then they blew the whistle ten minutes until one o'clock and that gave you ten minutes to get ready to go to work. They also had this fire whistle. They had a big sign out for it. There was a code from the fire whistle for each department. Anyway, if a fire started they would blow the fire whistle and you would count how the sounds went and you could look at this sign and then everyone would know what was on fire.

When I was there they really took care of them (the cars). They had the wooden cars also. The steel cars were just coming out. I don't know how long a wooden car would last. Off hand I would say we would repaint the cars (wooden cars) once a year. They must have been redone about once a year. In the Paint Shop there were at least fifty people. And we painted year 'round. I believe the cars were redone pretty often.

When the coaches came in they had a painter's helper. They would wash everything down and would scrape the handles on the armrests and different parts and we would have to refinish that. We wouldn't repaint everything, unless they put in a new pan or something like that. We would always repaint the floors and the framework. We would upholster; well, the upholsterers would. They would take all the windows out. They had a special room where they painted the windows. All the doors would be brought into a special room to be repainted. We would paint the restrooms. They also had baggage cars and mail cars that would come

in. They used to sort the mail on those cars.

They used to bring in the private cars. The president at that time was Bierd, I think. He had his private car. It was nice. The superintendent at that time had his private car also. We would work in those cars. We would get passes. Before I got married me and four or five of us guys would get a pass to Chicago and we would go and watch the burlesque shows.

Painting Cars

It would take about four men. But, we would have to prime it and paint it and putty all the holes and sand them down. Then, came two or three coats of varnish and then the lettering. It would take a long time. We usually did a real nice job. We just didn't paint them. We would spend a lot of time and a lot of money on them. I was telling my wife the other day that when they had the Red Train in there and was painting it, it was supposed to go out on a certain day. It would be lined up. If it was supposed to go out on the fifteenth, it would go out on the fifteenth. Those coaches would be kept up nice. Then, towards the end they weren't all that good anymore because they didn't spend that much money on them like they did when I first started there.

I did a lot of that lettering for the Chicago & Alton. They could be done with a pattern. They would teach the apprentices to do it. They would take manila paper and draw on it and then punch holes in it. Then you put this pattern on there and you take what is like chalk and punch it out and you would see the outline of "Chicago & Alton." They also would make stencils. When I left a lot of them were stencils.

I still have some tools. Each apprentice had a box of brushes and striping tools and things like that. You would keep all the striping tools. We did a lot of striping. I learned to be a pretty good striper. I did a lot of striping on car wheels. I did that on the side. There used to be a cover for spare tires and I would paint things on them. Now, when they stripe a car they do it like with tape. When I used to stripe those wheels they were spoke wheels. A lot of people would come in and they would want me to stripe their wheels. I always made a few extra dollars striping wheels. They taught us that at the yards, to stripe.

All the departments down there had a vol-



Final touch-up on a coach in the Paint Shop, June 1935. (Pantagraph photo)

leyball team. Once a week we would play at the Western Community Center. Every week you would play a different department. They also had a baseball team. I didn't play on the baseball team. I played on the volleyball team. It was a lot of fun. Many of the guys would play cards on the lunchtime and some would play horseshoes.

It was a place to work. I loved it there. But, if you had a job there and let it go, you would have to look for a different job when you did come back. So, the last time I just didn't go back. I did work steady.

It has been so long, but I would imagine I made about fifty cents an hour. That wasn't really very much compared to the wages you make today. It was a living wage. A lot of jobs at that time you would make fifteen dollars a week and you would get by. And now they make more than that a day.

I still see a lot of them (fellow workers). There was a fellow named Poling who died about a year or so ago. His name was Morris Poling. I will never forget him because he

would come around where we were working and he used to holler "What do you say?" I would tell him that I needed more sandpaper or some more paint and he would get it for us. He worked as an apprentice painter. Before he finished his time he had to leave. But, he would go down to the Paint Shop where they got everything ready for you and he would help with that. When you finished you had to leave, go somewhere else for a year or so before you could come back. To expand your knowledge. A lot of them would go near Chicago and work for them. By the time I got my job done this place was almost done also. If they needed like an electrician or a painter they would keep them. But, all these factories would want you to leave after you finished your apprenticeship.

I always liked working there. I have a lot of nice memories from that place. But, it will never be the same. Something I forgot to tell you was that in those days no one could smoke, so everyone chewed tobacco. You would look for a corner to spit in. Yeah, I

remember some of the fellows would be working and they would have a big chew in their mouths. Well, they would be looking all around for a good spot and then they would get rid of it in a corner.

Layoffs

I worked at Illinois Central cleaning switches. I shovelled snow in the wintertime. I used to haul coal. Everybody had coal stoves and furnaces. I remember you would go up town and some people would have a stove up on the second floor. I would carry a ton of coal in the basket on my shoulder to them.

When I was young I could carry it and it wouldn't bother me. I worked for this guy in this coal truck. Well, he would dump the coal out in front and I would carry the coal upstairs. The dentist's office even had coal stoves.

It was hard times. That is about all I can think of with my odd jobs. I did some painting and some car wheel striping. That is about it, I guess.

Williams Company

I would work at Eureka-Williams and then go to the Shops and work. I would get laid off from the Shops and so then I would go back to Eureka. In between times it would take two or three months to get back on. They didn't like it, either, me quitting all the time.

They wanted a lot of machinists. A lot of the workers from the Shops went there, like the welders. Carl Gerhardt was a welder and he came from the Shops. He used to always ask me if Eureka was hiring. He would also ask, "Do you think I could get a job?" My gosh, after the Shops laid him off he did get a job at Eureka. I can't think of anybody offhand that I see.

I had a lot of jobs there. When I retired I was spray painting. Before that I repaired refrigerators. I used to get a lot of work repairing refrigerators. I have been retired about twenty years. So, I retired from there in about 1973.

Social Life

That was Gale McGuire. He just died a couple of years ago. He was a painter's helper. We hung around together and did things like fishing. Gale would come about three in the morning to wake us up.

Mrs. Hoog: We lived upstairs and we didn't have an alarm, so we tied a string around Mr. Hoog's toe and threw it out the window. He would come to wake us up and he would pull that string around his toe.

Mr. Hoog: He would pull on that string. I would feel like someone was yanking on my toe. Well, he would be out there waiting for us to get up. Mostly fishing. We would ride around in a car.

Mrs. Hoog: We had a lot of fun.

Railroad Today

I went out with my brother. He worked there as a diesel repairer. He let me run the diesel last year. We went back and looked at the old Paint Shops and the Coach Shops and it almost made me cry.

The Yards are in shambles. When I worked there it was about a thousand or fifteen hundred people working there, and when you look there now it is all empty. It is sad. Oh, we worked in the Roundhouse. We would go in the Roundhouse and paint such and such a thing. We would letter the cabs and all. They had a big chart that showed you when the coaches went out and we had to have them done. We didn't just paint them. We had to prime them and put on the number two coating and sand them down. We really did a good job. We painted them just like the old wagons and the old milk wagons. It was a real fine job. It made me feel bad when the Roundhouse burned down because it was gone. It was terrible. Everything has to come to an end.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-Lamont

Anthony O. Koos

Born in Bloomington in 1909, Tony Koos went to work in the Wooden Coach Shop in 1926, learning the trade of a coach carpenter. A very exact trade, the railroad expected its wooden passenger cars to fit together tightly and exactly, to eliminate noise and to insure a longer life.

Like all apprentices, Tony Koos was "let go" after his four years of apprenticeship, and found railroad work in Missouri and Arkansas, where he learned that his training in Bloomington was more rigorous than that on other railroads. He eventually returned to Bloomington, working as a carpenter, contractor and eventually for Illinois Wesleyan University.

Childhood

I lived down on Emerson Street. It was a good neighborhood. My father was a garageman. Two people in the 400 block and one in the 300 block, they were railroaders. A man also lived on the block that was appointed postmaster or assistant postmaster. My father, the postmaster, a guy that lived next to him by the name of Maxwell were the only people in two blocks that had automobiles. It was a clean neighborhood, it was a well-kept neighborhood and there was nobody that gave anybody a bad time. There was never any bickering, no fighting back and forth or anything like that at all. There was eight or ten kids in the two blocks, and we had our own neighborhood gang, but we didn't give them a bad time. You just didn't give people a bad time in those days, it just wasn't the thing to do. The repercussions could be very strong.

It was a good school, (St. Mary's), eight grades. The first two years I took German. The war broke out and there was no more German taught in the school. I graduated from there, went to Trinity High School, and I guess that schooling just wasn't for me, I don't know, because after my freshman year I didn't go back. From there I went to the railroad. I went down and applied for a job; in fact the man next door to me was a timekeeper at the Steel Car Shop. I talked to him, so he set up an

appointment for me. I went down, took a written exam, three days later I come back and he says, "You're hired." I went to work in the Coach Shop.

1922 Strike

I was just a kid then. I remember one man, I won't mention his name, who was a foreman, I don't know whether it was the Machine Shop or the Boiler Shop, or in the Roundhouse, one of the three. He had two daughters. They went to the same school I did, St. Mary's over on Jackson Street, a parochial school. And, one day the little girls didn't come to school; they were two or three years apart. The next day's paper had the story in it. During the strike, his wife always came over to the outside of the shop, where he would cross and get on city property, then go home. Several of them kept following them, making snide remarks, insulting him, etc. Finally, they insulted his wife, and he was a hothead. He turned around, pulled a gun and shot the guy in the leg. He wasn't arrested for it or anything, it was just cleared away, though he was never liked after that. But he was a darned good man, the chairman of our scout troop which I was a Boy Scout of. I heard them talk several times about the strikes, the fellows.

Back then, too, the government kinda had their ears and eyes open, waiting or knowing or something, but anyway they were to put on a program, six weeks in a military camp, it was the National Guard. Two of us signed up; the other one backed out and I didn't. Boy, the static they were giving us. They had the National Guard to break up the strike here; if there's ever a strike they're going to send you and you might have to shoot somebody, etc. Actually, I know another fellow that did go and he did all right. He got up to master sergeant, and when the war broke out, he stayed with it, went to camp every year and I think also they had courses, whether it was in town or out of town, once or twice a week for x number of weeks. But anyway, when the war broke out, he became a lieutenant. And, I just often wonder what would have happened if I had stayed in.

Apprenticeship

It was a four year apprenticeship, and we started working at an hourly rate of 33 and 1/3 cents per hour. Back in '26, that was pretty good money; wasn't bad at all for a young guy. I worked at different things: worked x number of months on welding, x number of months in the Cabinet Shop, and x number of months in the Coach Shop.

There were, at the time, I think seven or nine

apprentices. Putting that on a basis of one apprentice for about every five journeymen or something like that, there could be 45-50 men in the Coach Shop. Then across the way, not a turntable, it was a transfer table where it went far in, they'd push a car from the railroad track onto the transfer table and would bring it down to whatever bay they could and put it in the Coach Shop, depending on what kind of repairs it was going to get. Then when we were finished, it went back on the transfer table and put into another building, just like the building we were in, but it was the Paint Shop and also the Trim Shop. When I say Trim Shop, it's where all of the seats, the tickets, the hat racks (ticket holders) and all the other accessories in the toilet areas at both ends, the carpenters or Coach Shop put those all back, rather than the painters.

They were easy going at times and kind of rough at times, too. The foreman was a hard-nosed man, but at the same time you couldn't find a man more fair than he. It was the old school: I want eight hours work for eight hours pay, and that's how he protected his job.

It was mostly repair work, and most of the coaches were wood. The interiors of them were finished either in oak or mahogany. The outside, the roof, the siding and interior, the framework was a pattern like you see on some

Coach Shop apprentices, 1930. Tony Koos, third from left, bottom row. (McLean County Historical Society)





Coach carpenters at work, March 1934. (Pantagraph photo)

English houses on the outside, with stucco. These things were so constructed to make that side more rigid than an ordinary structure. Even to the part never seen, the roughest part like the framing, you better be on the money with every cut you made . . . there was no room for a loose board or tight at one end and open at the other, just even a tiny little bit. Because even though you glued and it was nailed in place, their theory was it works loose and starts squeaking. Therefore, it had to be good.

The height of my delight was the journeyman that was selected, I think might have been Red Loker, I'm not sure, but the president's car was in there for a few days, and I worked on the president's car as an apprentice. I thought, boy, that's something. But his staterooms—the dining and sitting areas—were walnut, lovely walnut. His stateroom was birdseye maple, the next one was vermillion, then the next one was mahogany and the next one was oak. Now these were just big enough for one person and had your kitchen and such. No sleeping quar-

ters for the cook, don't know how he slept, if they were overnight, I'm sure that coach left the Chicago and Alton railroad tracks more than once travelling one place or another. But then, toward the end, I think about the last of my time, Red Loker was the lead man and I helped him all the way through the framing of a steel car, baggage car, and that took a little doing. It was through him that I learned to read a blueprint. So, we got finished with that one, and about two months later in comes another one. It was a combination baggage and mail car. I got on the job with him and he says, "O.K., there's the prints. You did it once, let's see if you can do it yourself."

I didn't like that one bit, 'cause I came home nights several times that, oh boy, I was so up tight. Then all of a sudden it dawned on me, this guy isn't going to let me make a mistake, so everything went hunky dory from there on. Got into areas where I just wasn't sure and he said, "This is the way it goes" and I had no difficulty at all. But actually, as I was saying, he says "you do it," it was on the basis of "let's

do it this way” and he says, “O.K., we’ll do it that way.” Well, I’m doing it right. And I made plenty of mistakes, I made a lot of them. I guess it was probably about four or five weeks I finished my time, and it wasn’t too long after as the apprentices finished their time, they kept having less men in the shop. Finally it was just sort of a stop-over for repairs, because it wasn’t too long after that the Baltimore and Ohio took over.

The Workforce

They were pretty much the same kind of people that I was. They were hard-working, good family men, just like anyplace else where you find them, anybody working, there were men who couldn’t leave the bottle alone. But really, when you get down to it, much of it was just a hum-drum way of life. You got up, you went to work, did what you had to do, you went home and your time was your own until the next day.

The thing that we were doing was so interesting, and I think that’s what helped everybody there, what they were doing was very interesting. And also it provided a very good source of living. Now they didn’t make as much money as the carpenters outside, but what we referred to as the carpenters outside were the house builders and people putting up buildings, but the four years that I worked there and the years before that and a number of years after that, there was never a layoff. Carpenters, generally, they probably started early spring, late fall or the middle of winter, they didn’t work until the next spring, and we worked the year ’round.

There were some Germans, there were some Englishmen. Now in the Cabinet Shop, there were eight benches that rotate. As an apprentice, I had one up to the front, the outside, up against the wall, and right next to me, to my left, was a German. In behind him was an Englishman, behind me was a Swede, then another German, then another Swede and the foreman was a Swede. Those men, as cabinet makers, they were real good. Without my knowing it, every now and then, one would sneak up behind, watching off to the side, and I wouldn’t know it, be there working, all of a sudden have him show up, took my tools, said, “That’s the way you do it.” They were good people. But, generally, I think there were probably some

Germans and Englishmen in the Machine Shop, like maybe they came over, but they were all journeymen and they were all, as far as I recall now, were in their 50s. More or less, the rest were all from Bloomington, born in Bloomington, and could be of German or Irish origin. I don’t think there were any Swedes anymore, they mostly went by the wayside, but they were all second generation. Of course there were a lot of Hungarians there, too. Maybe a dozen or so throughout the entire shop, something like that. It wasn’t like you would refer to them as, they’re Swedes, or they’re Englishmen or they’re Germans, they were just part of the group also. No distinction whatsoever.

Our work generally, all the way, was 5½ days a week, 8 hours a day. Coming home, I lived on West Taylor Street, not going to work, but coming home, I always walked to work, catch a switch engine, hop it and ride on almost down to the old Depot, and we got shagged so many times. The bulletin board was posted time and again about people hopping rides on the train, doing it on your own responsibility, the Shop isn’t going to give you a cent if you get hurt or pay for any of your doctor bills, etc. It got to the point, too, where they had to get some of the railroad police, kind of a patrolling thing, knocking it down. That went on for two or three months, and we were back at it again. One time, I don’t know where they were headed for, but I hopped it, there was about nine cars, freight cars, got on that thing and it got past the Depot and the thing started picking up speed, fast. Well I got off, and I had sense enough when I did get off to grab hold of the grab iron and not let go of it ’till I was sure I was on my feet. I was able to run fast enough, then I let go. Well, that cured me. I didn’t hop any more rides.

Union Membership

United Railroad Carmen and Joiners, I think they called it, and that took in the cabinet men. It also took in the freight yard, the rip tracks and the Steel Car Shop. I joined that when they put on quite a campaign. Two didn’t join right away, and the Union just had a little pull, and they didn’t always get the choice jobs. But that was within the first year of my joining that they joined, I would say six, seven months later. Then everything evened out. Then I went down to Little Rock to transfer into the



Coach Shop basketball team, c. 1928. Upper row: *Ed Butzirus, Tony Koos, painting foreman G. Flynn, unknown.* Bottom row: *Edward Scharfenberg, Andrew Bagosy, Art Crowley, George Lesh.*
(Anthony Koos)

Union there. But there wasn't any union anything like what you know or read or hear about unions today. We had a fellow by the name of Donovan, he was a former man of that shop, who had an office in Chicago, and he was our spokesman. He just wouldn't tolerate any nonsense either. If you had a legitimate complaint, O.K., we'll settle it. But I can't think of any one time there was truly a difficult situation for which this man Donovan had to speak for us. You just didn't do it back in those days. You had a job to do, you did it, and that was it.

I went on the outside, when I didn't go back to the railroad, and broke into the Carpenters' Union. I stayed with that until the war. When I come out, I went into contracting, and I kept that up until, oh I don't know, I guess I was at it fifteen, sixteen years, and I finished up as a carpenter over at Illinois Wesleyan University.

Traveling

It was a fairly well-rounded program, and at the end of the four years apprenticeship, they would not hire you back . . . go someplace else

and work and find out how they do things. Then, if there's any opening you could come back. There was never an opening that I know of, because they pretty much went by the wayside. That started when it went from the Chicago and Alton to the Baltimore and Ohio. That was the beginning of the downgrade of the Chicago and Alton railroad. Finally it just switched and switched.

But I did receive word from the Chicago and Alton that they were hiring on Missouri Pacific. Another guy and myself applied and the Missouri Pacific sent a railroad pass. We got a pass from here to St. Louis and a pass from St. Louis to Little Rock, Arkansas, round-trip pass. After x number of weeks or months or whatever, you could almost get what you wanted in the way of a pass, travel anywhere in the United States or Mexico. I had a pass to go to Mexico, going with another fellow. We were going to try and go down there and work for the Missouri Pacific in Mexico. It might have been a possibility, because we knew that all the foremen and superintendents and such

were all Americans. Getting our pay down in Mexico, you could live like a king. But he ups and gets married and that's the end of it, I didn't go down by myself. They employed a goodly number of people in that shop, how many I can't tell you.

Only one man that I know that did finish his trade and get back without going to work somewhere else. We just figured, though he never said, that this guy had a little pull. That's about all I can tell you.

When we got down to North Little Rock, we found out there were apprentices who were finishing their time that had not worked wood at all. All of their cars were steel, and much of it was bought through contract shops instead of building their own. As far as I know, I know this shop in Little Rock didn't, and I don't think the one in Sedalia, Missouri, they did

much more of the heavier repair stuff than Little Rock did. But these fellas, well, they didn't get the understanding that we got, that is the understanding between journeyman and apprentice. In that respect, we were much better off than they were.

The only thing, special feeling that you would have is that when you were finished, you were a true craftsman. All of this work was so particular and so precise, on the outside, building a house the framing was good, this and that, and their inside work, trim and all, where they had cabinets and all of that fancy stuff, now those men were very good, but the framing didn't have to be as exacting or particular.

Interviewer: Mary Beth Heine

Jean McCrossin

When most of Bloomington was trekking to growing State Farm for employment, Jean McCrossin left the young insurance giant to do office work for the railroad, in an office over the Machine Shop and with coal smoke wafting through the windows.

Raised in the family of her boilermaker uncle, the young woman knew the West Side and the surrounding railroad neighborhood. Her story is a fascinating account of office work at that time, when the field was still dominated by men, and she was one of the few women working at the Shops.

Despite a very rough workplace with crude conditions, Jean McCrossin speaks with the same pride that many of the other railroaders in this book have, and felt that same sense of connection and family that working together on the railroad bred.

Childhood—Memories of the Railroad

My grandfather worked there when he first came to this country. My grandmother and grandfather came from Ireland in 1867 and my grandfather worked at the Shops in those years; of course I didn't really know him because he passed on when I was quite young.

My mother was born in Bloomington and my father was born on this farm near Funk's Grove. I was an only child. My father was a farmer.

I went to live with my aunt and uncle, my uncle was a boilermaker down there. After my parents passed on, I went to live with them and he was a boilermaker, which meant that he would work in the Shops and this was back in the 1930s, and he probably worked there for at least twenty-five years. So I was really brought up sorta from the age of 12 in the railroad family. I remember him talking about what the Shops were like in those days and how they worked down there.

There were all of these big stone buildings, they were made—as I remember—out of big blocks, tan stone, and the Roundhouse where they took the engines in to work on them—and it literally was a roundhouse—that was a focal point. Oh, one thing, this is a personal thing, but you might enjoy it, and I think that it prob-

ably was very indicative of a lot of people. Payday at the Shops, (they called it the Shops, sometimes they didn't even say the C & A Shops), was a special day and I can remember my aunt and my cousin, he was about five years older than I was, her son, and payday at the Shops—my aunt always got dressed up, and my cousin and me, usually, if I wasn't in school and he wasn't in school, or in the Summer, we would go down and get my uncle's paycheck and go to the bank, or we would buy things, and it was a special day, payday. Payday at the Shops meant a lot in this town and actually because all the—see this was a big employer really—and it meant business kinda boomed that day for them. But I can remember yet that it was exciting, this was the day we were going to have the paycheck and people lived a lot like that, maybe they still do, I don't know, but it was not just a routine day, it was a special day.

I went to grade school after we moved to Normal. I went to Metcalf, the training school for ISU, and most of the kids I remember out there, their parents were on the faculty at the University, a lot of faculty children went there. I knew a few people that were railroad people, but there was something even then I think that

made you think that railroad people were good people. They worked hard—they were solid citizens, that sort of thing, no matter what they did they felt like they were good people. That's the impression that I really grew up with.

I am sure there was a class distinction there—an engineer was the—you know run the trains and then if they were supervisors or yard masters, you see they had yard masters like that, work in the office as clerks, they were most superior to the general run of the laborers, in other words the people who had supervisory positions, that was the kind of a thing you always wanted to work up to.

My uncle had worked there—he worked there till he was 75 years old. You didn't have to quit, he could've worked until he was 80 or 90 I guess—as long as you were able to work they didn't have any retirement age. Most of them—a lot of them—started when they were 16 years old. Even in the office. I worked with some men who started working in different parts of the Shops when they were 16 years old. They didn't even finish high school and it was their lifetime career, and when you got there you didn't quit, you didn't move away or do anything else. You just stuck with it. I suppose there were some that did but most of them just stayed on. If you worked there thirty years you could retire with a pension if you wanted to. This one man I knew took retirement when he was 46 and then he went out to Eureka-Williams and got a job as an accountant and he probably worked there till he was 65 or something like that. It was pretty exciting. And yet I suppose some people wouldn't do that, but I would. I liked it. I really liked it.

My uncle was a boilermaker and he used to just complain bitterly because if he was using—he was on one of these big old locomotives that they had in those days, and if he spilled any oil or anything like that he could not—he was not allowed to wipe it up. He had to call a wiper, I believe they called them, in other words a laborer. He would be so provoked about that because—he would say, I could wipe that up myself and have it done for, instead I have to wait around for this person to come. The railroads were very strong, the railroad brotherhoods were very strong labor unions.

He was of Swiss descent. His parents—I

don't know, his grandfather or great grandfather or great great grandfather or somebody had come from Switzerland and he used to talk about the "Hunkeys" that would be—maybe—you know the Hungarians or these people that worked out there. The different groups—people who worked in different positions in the Shops tended to be maybe the same ethnic groups, like the English people—there were a lot of English people, Irish people, the Hungarians, the Germans, the Polish—would live in—Italians, would live more or less in similar neighborhoods and would have similar types of work.

Working at the Shops

When I graduated from high school I went to work at State Farm Insurance because that was the big place to work and then I worked there about five years and I decided I wanted to make a change and I heard the railroad was hiring at that time so I went down and put in an application and started to work there, I think in 1943.

I just went down there and put in an application, I guess, and then they didn't call me for two or three months afterwards, then they called me. The office where I was hired to work was the division accountant's office and they hadn't hired any girls—well they hired one girl to work in there in the past five years. See this was just along World War II, about the second year of World War II and employment was really beginning to pick up everywhere, including the railroads, because the railroads during the war, they really were very important as a means of transportation for all the troops were transported on the railroads, all the food—see they didn't have the trains or trucks and the highway system that they have today, it was just all railroads. Everybody traveled around on the trains, they drove cars of course, but not even the buses were systems like there are today. Railroads were the big thing. And particularly for freight handling, and all the big troop trains went by railroad.

It would be quite a shock, I think, today, to think that we worked under conditions like that. It was the second floor of a Machine Shop building, the lower floor was the Machine Shop and it was right in the middle of the railroad yard, and we went up an outside stairway to get there. It was a closed stairway so we

didn't have to go through the Machine Shop but the floors in the office where we worked were just wide board floors. I think that the division accountant, the head man, had carpet on his floors but otherwise—just big old windows that had no screens or anything, of course, they never heard of air-conditioning in those days, so it was hot in the summer, cold in winter, and the girls would put their feet in the wastebaskets to warm them in the wintertime because it was so drafty around there between the windows and the floors; the floor boards were not finished.

I did typing, I used the dictaphone and typed letters for the man I worked under. When I first went down there I had this job that paid \$160.00 a month and the girl that I was replacing had enlisted in the WAVEs and then she went off and she was rejected, so she came back and I was bumped, and in railroad terms that means that she had the seniority, so I just lost that job. Well, fortunately they were needing someone to work in this other department so they hired me there. Otherwise I would've been out a job because the railroad operates strictly on seniority. They post the job descriptions on the bulletin board and if you were qualified or thought you were qualified and had enough seniority you could apply for those jobs and the person with the most seniority that was qualified would get the job. And the individual was not paid as an individual, the job was paid. In other words, you knew when you took this job exactly what you had to do and how much you would be paid.

Well, I really worked independently I think, there were others that were doing the same work as I was doing, but I did work with some of the men who would do the accounting work and then I was doing the typing for them. There was one really cute little old Irishman, and if you found him making a mistake, he would always say, "I just wanted to see if you were awake." He would never admit he made a mistake. The working conditions at that time, we didn't really think anything of it, but today I am sure that people would have a different view because there was a chief clerk who sat in the middle of this large room that we were in.

I think there were probably about 25-30 employees, men and women, there were about 10 women, and about 15-20 men and his job

was really almost like an overseer.

We didn't talk to each other during working hours at all, except that we had a fifteen minute break in the morning and fifteen minutes in the afternoon that you could make a telephone call, or you could visit with people or you could walk around or you could have a cup of coffee. One of the girls had a little hot plate and she had coffee but otherwise during the rest of the time you were there from 8 to 5 with an hour for your lunch. You really did not talk to anybody socially at all. If you had anything to say to them about the work that was all right, but you simply did not visit with anybody. He (the chief clerk) was a very nice man, very, very kind and he was there to see that the work was done. He supervised not only the typists and everybody, but he was the liaison between the man who was the division accountant, that was the office where we worked. They always referred to that office by that man's name. They called it Langham's office. His name was Mr. Langham. I mean nobody said they worked in the division accountant's office, you would just—if you were just talking to anybody you would say I work in Langham's office and then they knew where you were working. One little thing that I think was interesting is that in spite of this regimen that you couldn't visit, couldn't talk, when the World Series in baseball would be on, then they would bring a radio and they would have the radio on and we could all listen to the World Series. There were a lot of the men that were baseball fans and that would always seem sorta strange, when they were so strict about visiting or anything else, but they had to have the radio on and we would all get to listen to the World Series.

People really respected you and they would say, "Oh, you work for the railroad, you work for the C & A?" In those days it was part—I think—of the Alton Route and that was part of the Baltimore & Ohio System because by that time the Chicago and Alton had been sold and resold and everything but they still called it—all the local people called it—the C & A Shops. "Oh, you work at the Shops? Oh, that is terrific. Where do you work?" And then you tell them and it was really—I think people really did think it was something special about working for the railroad and we had that feeling that it was more than just a job. It was some-

thing—kind of special.

There was the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks Union. Now, I did not belong to it because you didn't have to in order to work there. But I got into a little problem with them because I was very—sorta young at the time and I didn't know really what was going on. This man that was head of the office didn't speak to his secretary, he didn't like her, he had a quarrel with her and when he found out that I could use a dictaphone; not use a dictaphone, but take shorthand he would call me into his office to take dictation—write the letters for him. I really enjoyed that because I had been a secretary before at State Farm. And when the Brotherhood entered a complaint without saying anything to me about it. And I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to be doing that because it wasn't in my job description. So, this man, Mr. Langham, called me into the office and read me the riot act about it because he thought I had filed a complaint through the Brotherhood and I convinced him I had not, so how he got around that so I could continue to do this work was to have the job description changed so I could use the dictaphone and I kept on doing the work. It was kind of a kooky thing and we had some unusual people working out there.

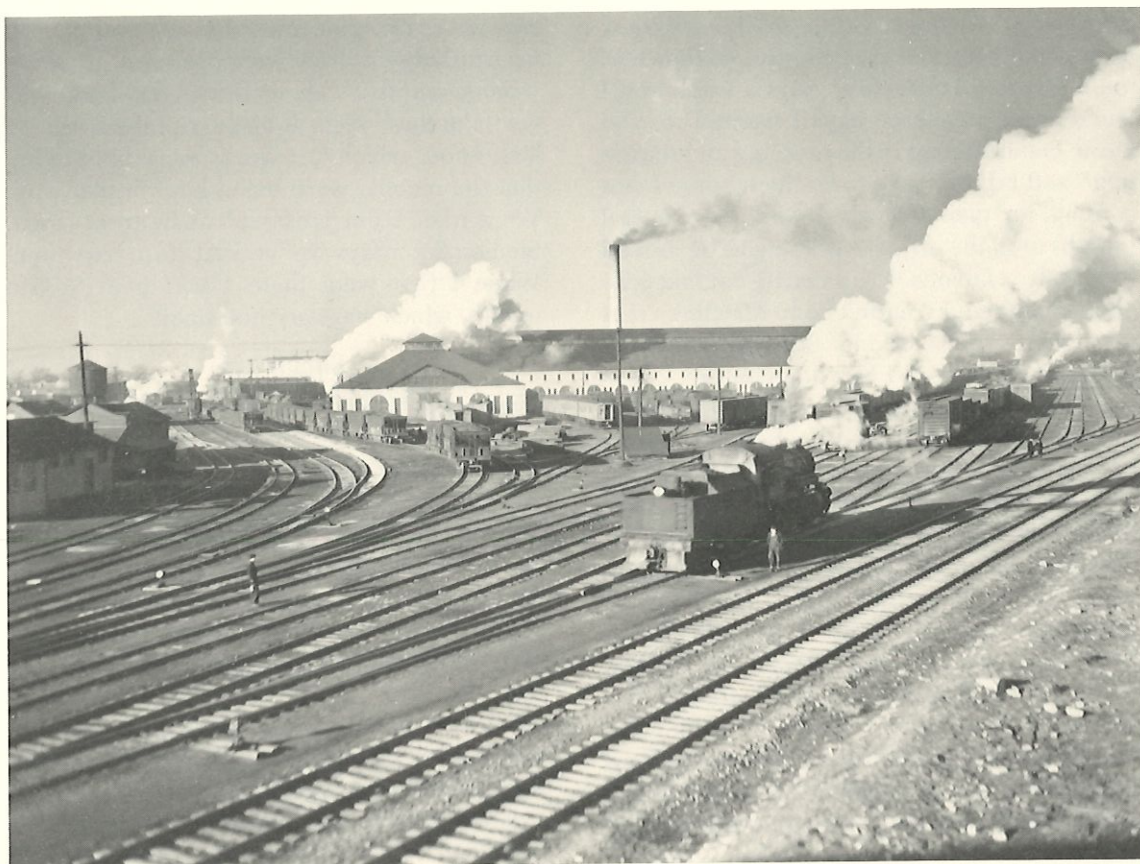
I was just thinking about some of the people that I have worked with and I am wondering if they would be hired today. They were really characters, very unusual people and now with so many places using personnel managers and giving people tests to see if they are qualified for the jobs, some of these people would not have gotten a job because in those days a lot of times you were hired because you knew somebody or a relative of yours was already an employee, or a neighbor was an employee or something like that. There was a lot more of a personal relationship I think.

There was this one little man, I wouldn't want to tell you his name, but he was a cute little fellow, he was a bachelor, he seemed old to me at the time, he was probably was maybe 40 or so, and they knew that he drank on the job but they couldn't figure out where he kept his whiskey because it just got to be—the whole office knew that he—where he would go off and get himself a swig of whiskey and then he would be a different person. So finally, one day someone, I don't know if it was the

chief clerk or somebody else, they had been keeping an eye on him for quite some time. They went into the men's restroom and they discovered that he was keeping his whiskey bottle in the water tank of the toilet and the water tank in those days—you know—was hung high on the wall, way up above the toilet stool so that gravity would flush the toilet when you pulled the chain. He had this whiskey bottle that he kept on a string and he would have it so that he could stand on the toilet and reach up and get this whiskey bottle, take a swig of whiskey, put it back down there and nobody knew where it was. Then they discovered it. They didn't fire him, I think they just gave him a talking to but they didn't fire him.

Most of the women wore house dress types of things, we didn't dress up, it was dirty down there because of all the dust, especially in the summer. See, we were right in the middle of the yards where the trains were switching and everything, so in the summer, at that time—there were dresses for the younger girls—and the older ones wore house dresses but some of us that were younger ones wore short outfits in those days. It was a blouse and shorts in one piece and then you wore a skirt over that, a matching skirt, so when you had the skirt buttoned it looked as if you had a dress. So when we sat at our desk, we would unbutton the skirt so we sorta would keep cooler that way by having the shorts outfit, but we wouldn't dare have ever walked around in a pair of pants or blue jeans or anything like that. Everybody wore skirts. The trains were operating on coal and black smoke would just pour out and the dust—everything was dusty, and it was very primitive compared to today.

While I worked there myself, we never went downtown except on payday and I guess that somebody would have a car and they would take us all downtown and we would all eat lunch downtown maybe, and go to the bank because otherwise we just didn't have any time to do that. We had to be at work from 8 to 5, we would just ride back and forth to work and we'd eat our lunch at the railroad hotel down there and if we felt real plush we would eat our lunch there. It was right along—across the tracks from the Shops, and otherwise we carried our lunch; a cold lunch, nobody ever heard of a hot lunch.



C&A Shops from the Locust Street bridge, January 1938. (Pantagraph photo)

When I went to work there was a fellow that lived several blocks from us that worked in the same office. And he picked up, I think there were four of us that rode with him, he picked us all up and took us back and forth. Because very few, especially girls, didn't have cars. It was quite unusual if a girl had a car, and it was sorta unusual for a young man to have a car. Even back in World War II or before World War II. Too expensive, couldn't afford it. So that transportation made a difference where you lived—if you worked for the Shops you had a tendency to live in the general area. We weren't terribly far, we could walk—I have walked up there to work when the weather was good, it was probably a mile, couple of miles. That was where a lot of the shop workers lived—in the area called Forty Acres—it was right up by the Shops.

Most of those people were the laborers, I think. Polish, Italians, Hungarians, and the engineers maybe had a certain area that they lived in. They just sorta tended to go—to be with their own people that they were associated with. I know I had a friend, that was

really a very close friend, and after we were married, her father was a railroad man and we—my husband had a friend that was a young man after the war—neither of them were married—so we thought, gee, we would get them acquainted with each other. So they got acquainted with each other. His father was a railroad engineer, her father was a railroad engineer, so my friend's husband, when they were married, he said I didn't have a chance, because—see this would be, her father was a railroad engineer, why they were just bound to be nice people. Really—that was it—as I said there was this special feeling of kinship that people had at that time and I don't think they do as much—because the railroad isn't all that important; however, I still feel sorta of a kinship with people who worked there because I worked there, it's just sort of a fraternity I suppose. Now I don't know if everybody feels that way, but I think a lot of people do.

I worked there in 1943 and 1944 and then I was gone for about two and a half years, and when I came back they called me and wanted to know if I would come back to work. I really

didn't want to work full-time and I don't know if they really needed me full-time, so they told me if I would come three days a week and I could come any three days I wanted to, you know I could get up in the morning and decide to go and I didn't have to let them know I was coming, so then I worked there for several months until the office was going to be moved to Mobile, Alabama. I was married at that time and I told them I couldn't go to Mobile so that was when I quit working. But I did the same similar type of work I had done before.

I really liked it, it was something sort of exciting about working for the railroad, at least during that period. You—you had a feeling that you were kinda special. Now when I left Bloomington and went with my husband, he was stationed in St. Louis in the Navy, and so I could go to what they called the Railroad Retirement Board and, they were in all the large cities, and if you had worked—or worked for the railroad anywhere they were just like an employment agency. So when I went to St. Louis I went to the Railroad Retirement Board saying that I was looking for work and I immediately got a job working for the Wabash Railroad in St. Louis and worked there for several months until my husband was transferred to Chicago. Then again I worked for the Alton in Chicago at that time.

One thing I would like to mention is the fact that we had so few of the business machines that are found in offices today. We had manual typewriters, adding machines, and there was a machine called a comptometer and I can't even find that in the dictionary now. I used to think that if I knew how to type, take shorthand, and operate a comptometer I would just have my business career in shape because comptometer operators were very well paid. They were paid better than typists or stenographers, either one. You had to go to school and learn how to operate one and they must—I never did know exactly what they were exactly like, I saw them but I didn't know how to operate one, because that was really a skill and they must have been similar or somewhat like calculators.

When I was in Chicago, I worked in the treasurer's office and they made a job for me really because I had worked here, my husband was a serviceman, and they wanted to help. They were really bending over backwards to

hire wives of servicemen. We entered payroll in large ledgers. They were probably about six women and that's all we did all day long, was just take these records and write them out by long hand, which just seems incredible today that the records were being kept in that way. We worked from 8 to 5 with an hour for lunch, then on Saturdays we worked from 8 to noon. When I first went there I was paid \$135 a month, which was very good pay.

Social Life

They used to have picnics—I remember picnics at Miller Park for the Alton employees where everybody went and it would be an all-day affair. I can remember that I went a couple of times, I know they had lots of food, they had games, you know, and different things for the people to participate in. It was like a family picnic for everybody that worked at the Shops and it was really a big affair, because at that time they didn't have nearly as many employees as they probably had in the previous times but when the war came along then they did have more employees.

I belonged to a high school sorority that I belonged to for a long time. I was friendly with some of the people that I worked with—I mean we would get together when somebody got married. Now when I got married they took up a collection, gave me a wool blanket, which I still have. You know it was a big event. You see up until that time it was rather unusual for a married woman to be working in an office prior to World War II. Usually—now when I worked at State Farm, the ones that worked there, if you got married—you got a nice set of knives, forks and spoons, silverware, and then you were through working. The only married women that worked were ones who were widows, or their husbands were not well; it was an unusual circumstance for a married woman to be working.

Now at the railroad there were some married women, I don't know how that happened because normally they were not working at the places. But when World War II came along and then all the young men were going to the war and they actually took them up to 35 or 36 years old, even maybe up to 40 if they didn't have—so they had to hire women to do these things. No married school teachers either.

Railroad Pass

You could travel on a pass, railroad pass, not only you but your family too. But I hadn't been there long enough to get a full pass, but I got a part pass, half pass. I was going to Oklahoma City, so when I got on the train in St. Louis I didn't feel well, I felt terrible in fact, but I was bound to go down there and visit him because I hadn't seen him for a few months, so I said to the railroad conductor, "Do you think I could get a berth?" He said "Oh no, no way you could get a berth." I said "Well, I am traveling on a pass." He knew I worked for the railroad, so he said "I will see what I can do." So lo and behold he came back and he had gotten a berth for me. Now how he got it and where he got it, I don't know but there is a little example of how the railroad people would help each other.

They used to have railroad detectives and I knew one here in Bloomington, Tom Rendell. He was a grand old fellow. Everytime I would travel around on the train anywhere he would always say he would "keep an eye on you so nothing happens to you." He would tell this to my uncle, "So she will be O.K., I'll keep my eye on her," because they would ride the trains to see what was going on. They wore plain clothes but they were called railroad detectives to see if everything was O.K. So you always felt sorta safe. You felt like, gee, I could go up to the conductor or somebody and say I work for the Alton Road, and then right away they would say well, you're part of the fraternity and they would help you out.

Interviewer: Mary Beth Heine

George & Cathern Ziegler

Born in Southern Illinois in 1904, George Ziegler filled a variety of jobs for the railroad, from a laborer in the Wheel and Axle Shop to night ticket agent at the Bloomington Depot.

His interview reveals an extremely hard-working, dedicated character, who was unafraid to stand up for himself and who worked up from a laborer position to become chief clerk for the Engine House.

Some comments from his wife, Cathern, are also included here, including the fascinating story of their courtship and first meeting, when she helped him when he had car trouble. A picture of some independent, fun-loving people results.

In the Wheel and Axle Shop

George: I shoveled snow all day, it snowed the night of the 2nd and it snowed all night and the next day there was about eight inches of snow on the ground and I went to work and spent the day sweeping snow off piles of lumber.

I went to the Wheel and Axle Shop for five years or six years, rolling wheels, unloading and loading cars of wheels. They got a twenty thousand dollar machine takin' my job when I left there. They'd come in, shipped in boxcars, 100 to a boxcar, and one man would get inside the boxcar, they were sitting on edge, and raise them up and roll them out and the other one would get down and catch them and take them either into the shop or over and stack them in the storage area. They weighed from 650 to 1,100 pounds. Just like little kids rolling a hoop, you know, you've seen little kids rollin' hoops. That the way you roll them. That's how I stayed on at the shop during the Depression. I had a job nobody else wouldn't have.

I never packed lunches from the time I went to school, all the time I eat breakfast and supper on the days I worked. Then after I got to the Engine House, why we would come home for dinner, part of the time, not all of the time.

I was getting more up in the world, I built four houses and sold them, and I got myself straightened around.

For quite a while over there we worked three days a week for a whole \$10.50 a week. We was working three days a week making \$10.50 a week and I was spending \$16.50 for house rent and I got where I couldn't afford it no longer. So my mother gave me a couple hundred dollars and we moved out here. \$100 for the lot and \$100 for lumber to build a house.

Cathern: We built two houses with a big porch-like running along the side for a friend and our children were just little folks then, and the bedrooms, living room, dining room and everything else was together.

George: Times was hard back in them days.

Cathern: One day he said to me, "I am so sick of this place," oh, several years ago, when the children were still in school, and he says "I'm getting so sick of this place, I'm going to build a house big enough to turn around in." So he went to work and had a plan and he built us a big house, and we used it then until the children were all grown and gone. Then he says "I'm sick of this house," and he goes down and looked all over the place and he built this place. And I wouldn't trade this place for anybody.

He built that (the fireplace). And we've got a bigger one in the basement. We've got a full basement under this house, a big fireplace

right down under this one.

George: If I had the gas to drive, I drove and if I didn't have the gas, I walked. We had an old Model T. Some of them you had to crank, you didn't have to crank them all. I had a starter on the one we had. And when we had gas, I rode or when the snow wasn't too deep. There have been days the snow was too deep and then I walked.

I ain't never been out of work. During the Depression in '32 when I was off, I hauled coal for 25¢ a pound, er . . . I mean, 25¢ an hour. I was raised on hard work.

Supply Train

George: Well, I come back in the Storeroom there for about three or four months and then went on the supply train, out on the road. We delivered gasoline to all the section houses and kerosene for their lanterns and stuff, and all the tools, picks, stuff; well, everything that these section men used to maintain the railroads. We had a bunk and everything right there, slept right on the car. We'd be gone for a week at a time. We'd go from here to Kansas City, the first day we'd go to Ashland, then the second day we would go down to Roodhouse, and Roodhouse would take us all day to work there, to work all the sections in Roodhouse, and then the next night we'd spend at Centra-
lia, Missouri, and we worked them, then we'd go to Slater the next day and work there, and then from Slater we would go on into Kansas City. And then we would spend one day working the sections in Kansas City. See, they had a section about every eight, ten miles, sections had to have supplies to keep the maintenance up.

That would take about a week. Well, you see we'd go and we'd get on a passenger train and come on home when we got done. We'd turn the train over to the crews and let them bring it home. Of course, the regular freight crew that went through was what would pull us, and we worked with them and we would go to each terminal each day and work and then go on to the next one. They took it off in about two or three years. You see, there are no sections anymore on the railroad, and no water towers. They used to have a water tower every fifty mile any way. They had one down here south of town, here at Hopedale and up north up here at Chenoa, I think they had a water

tank, and they had a section crew at every water tank.

Union Activity

George: I was a member of the Union and had a lot of trouble. Sometimes bosses would push you around, you know, and they don't agree with you, and I never did like to be pushed around. And I wasn't a trouble maker either.

There in the Storeroom the helpers were supposed to be the ones pushing the pencil, they had a big bunch of laborers in there pushing a pencil, and I got a grievance and got seven jobs set up. And then I collected some money one time from them.

I bid a job in and then they kicked me off of it and they paid me for the difference, the wages of the job I was on and the wages of the job that I bid in. They went down to St. Louis and brought a fellow up to take the job in the Storeroom, that I had bid in, seniority.

Whenever I left the Wheel and Axle it didn't work that way. Mr. Wolfe was storekeeper then, and Mr. Foley was his chief clerk. He sat outside the door and I couldn't get in to see the big boss. So one morning I met the big boss out, before he got out of his car, and I turned that one around without having to go to the Union at all. I bid a job in the Storeroom, I was getting tired of it and I wanted a little bit of an advancement. And they couldn't find nobody over there to do my job at the Wheel and Axle, so I talked to the storekeeper out in front of the Storeroom that morning—before he got in the building, he didn't get in the building. And I told him that, what they had done, and he said, "They can't do that." "Well," I said, "they did." He said, "They can't." So O.K., I thanked him and went on back to work. And it wasn't just a little bit till I went over to the Storeroom to work. I didn't have to go back to the Wheel and Axle no more. No, they, there was always people pullin' stuff, you know, on you if they can, gettin' by with it.

I'm still a member of the Union. I never had an active part, I just did a little trouble shootin' and when they tried to push me around or push, I had more trouble with pushin' the other guys around than I did with them pushing me around. I couldn't outtalk them, I just, they just knew I wouldn't back down I guess, I don't know. I got by with a lot that a lot of people didn't get by with, but I don't know why. There are always people to push you around,

you know that, no matter where you're at. You always find them kind of people. Not many of them, 'cause the majority of people are good.

Store Helper

George: I went back to the Storeroom as a store helper, there wasn't nothing to it. Well, as I was tellin' you unpackin' and packin' stuff and keepin' a record of everything. I was back in the Storeroom three years before I went to the Depot. I put stock away, and keep books, keep a record of everything, and unpack the materials and put them in bins and things. See, we had about 40,000 items over there at that time, could be anything. And I'd, the locomotive castings that they had down on the platform and things, I'd have to assemble them and put the numbers on them, and keep a record of all that stuff. Flunky . . . That's it, flunky.

Night Ticket Agent

George: I was a night ticket agent. I went over the books every night to see if there was any mistakes and see if they got enough money, and kept a record of all the money and stuff.

Well, down there at the Depot I worked from 7:00 to 11:00—your regular, I said 7:00 to 11:00, I mean 11:00 to 7:00, in the morning, yeah, I got things turned around there. That's when I was the night ticket agent.

Well, Mr. Clooney is the only one that ever give me a recommendation when I left there. He wrote me a letter and told me that he was sorry to see me leave. Mr. Clooney. He was ticket agent down there for fifty some odd years, I think. He was 89 when he retired. He was the only ticket agent down there, he was there from the time I started on the railroad, he was a ticket agent and he was ticket agent quite a while after I left. I was down there to his, when he retired. I think he was 89 when he retired. And he could run up and down them stairs there at the Depot. He could just go like that and I couldn't do it.

The last trip that I think we made, where we got over here at the Depot just as the train was pulling out and they stopped and let us on. And we went over to Champaign-Urbana and caught the I.C. (Illinois Central) out of there and had a Pullman to New Orleans. We spent the day in New Orleans and that night we got on a train and rode to Houston, and we spent

the next day in Houston and that night we got on the train and rode to El Paso, and when my vacation started I was in El Paso, Texas, eating breakfast. See I was working nights at the Depot at that time from 11:00 to 7:00, and I was eating breakfast in El Paso, Texas, when my vacation started.

Chief Clerk: Engine House

George: And then I went to the Engine House, clerk, chief clerk. I had to keep time of all the employees, and make tickets for them to get stuff from the Storeroom, and just what any clerk would do. Keep the time and all.

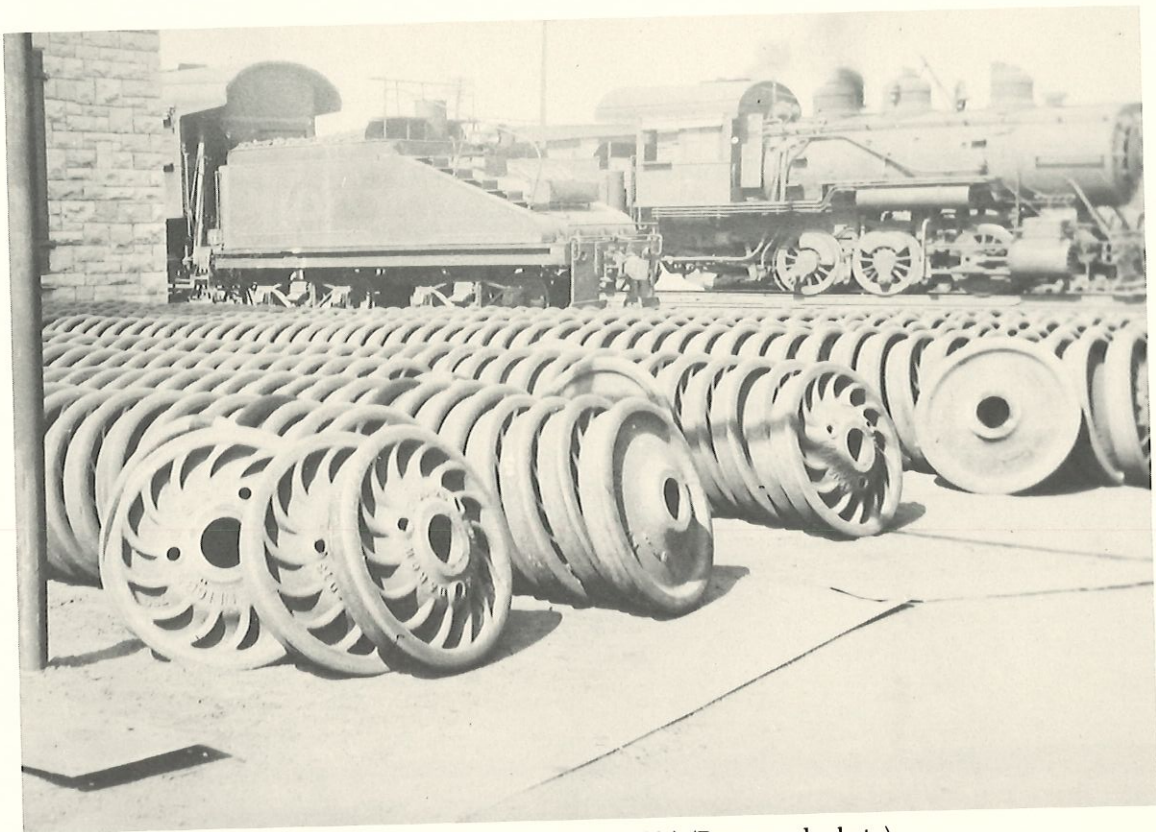
The only reason I'd change jobs was a case of getting a little money, extra money. I think money, I didn't care about the work, just the money. And if it's hard work and it paid more money, that's the one I wanted. Less work and paid more money, that's the one I wanted. See I started in out there as a laborer and then the last twenty years I was a clerk, twelve years at the Ticket Office and about nine years at the Engine House. But the rest of the time, you're just a flunky.

I worked from 7 a.m., well in the Storeroom 7 to 4 and then at the Engine House 8 to 5. An hour for lunch. Something I never had in my life was a coffee break. Now they couldn't live without their coffee break and stuff. No, I was ready to go to work when you started work, work till noon, take your noon hour and then go back and work, till quitting time.

Cathern: He lived on a farm, you see. His father died when he was a baby and his mother married some time afterwards, but his stepfather was just the same as a father, and he just worked all day long.

Shopping

George: We done most of our shopping right at the end of the Depression there. One of the old storekeepers from the GM & O run the A & P store over on Locust Street, Frank Riley, and we traded with him for years and then he moved up town and we started trading with Charlie Payne, and we traded with Charlie Payne until 1942 or '43, then Tommy Miller had opened a little store up here and we started trading up there. Tom Miller. He opened a little store up here, oh, I don't know, it's up, uh, an athletic store . . .



Wheel & Axle Shop, December 1934. (Pantagraph photo)

Courtship

George: Well, I kept myself busy. I always had a big garden and tried to be self-sufficient.

Cathern: I was a whole 17 when I joined up with him.

George: 20 when I met her, 21 when we were married.

It was at Richardson Hill. I got hung on the hillside and she come out and pushed me over the hillside and she been pushin' me ever since.

Well, my stepfather and I went over, he went to a sale and bought a bunch of bees and we went over and loaded the truck up with a bunch of bees and this place, Richardson Hill, was where everybody took their old Model Ts and if they'd go over that hill in high, they were running perfect, but if you didn't get over it in high you throwed it down low, and the gas tank was under the seat and if your engine got too hot for the gas tank you didn't get no gas, so you rolled back down the hill. That's where everybody took their cars to test them, down there. Bringing some bees back, and I met a little 16-year-old filly.

Cathern: Well, I seen him out there and I walked up there so I could see him good, and so he could see me.

George: She was underneath the car up there. Back in the old days, you know, you wrapped stove pipe around the muffler, instead of putting a new muffler on, you just wrapped stove pipe and wire on it to get rid of the sound, and she had been underneath the car putting that tin stove pipe around the muffler. She had just crawled out from under it.

Cathern: You can imagine what I looked like. After I seen him, I said, "That's him."

George: I guess. And we haven't been separated for fifty-eight years. Can't everybody say that.

Cathern: Well, honey, we have had a very good life.

George: We was married on August 15, in '25. We moved up here in '27.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte

*New General Motors diesels head north from
Bloomington, late 1940s. (Kenody J. Charlton)*

**The Survivors:
1940-1972**



Thomas L. Moore

A great love for steam locomotives echoes through Thomas Moore's story, even though he had only a few years contact with the belching giants.

Moore came to Bloomington during World War II, looking for better wages than his farmhand's job in rural Clark County. He was hired in the Shops on his birthday, January 2, 1943, and worked until 1946, mostly in the Roundhouse. World War II was a hectic time on America's railroads, as they were the nation's prime transport system at the time, in the days before Interstate highways and dependable air transport.

After his lay-off, Moore returned to railroad work in 1951, working as a switchman, until an injury forced his retirement in 1973. Like many, he came to the Shops looking for a job, and the excitement and spirit of working in the nation's premier transportation industry, surrounded by the sights and sounds of steam, got into his blood, fostering a pride and enjoyment of the craft of railroading.

Beginnings

I started in the Back Shop as a metal inspector on the driving rods, which connect the wheels together near the axles. This was done by whitewashing the rods after cleaning them. When the whitewash dried you hit the rods with a large hammer; if cracks were seen in the whitewash, then the rods were sent back to the melting pot to be molded again. Then after two weeks, I transferred to the Roundhouse. I built fires in the steam engines with coal and shavings. Other jobs in the Roundhouse included flue blowing, fire knocking, engine washing and waxing, servicing passenger engines at the Depot, hostling engines and all labor jobs in general, in addition to being foreman.

In December, 1944, I became a brakeman on the road and flagged passenger trains. In May, 1946, the Alton Railroad was taken over by the G.M. & O. The diesel engine was replacing the steam. The engineers went on strike May 7, 1946. The Shops and Roundhouse were closed a few days, a lot of jobs were abolished and the Back Shop and Coach Shop were closed in the 1950's.

Farming

It was in the wintertime, January of 1943, a fellow I was working for gave me \$2.00 a day and I didn't work every day during the winter and I needed more money to support my family. So I came to the railroad and made 54¢ an hour and worked as many hours as I could. It was more or less a have-to case, although I like farming I'm glad that I chose the railroad.

Henry Price was the one who got me started with the railroad shops. He was responsible for maintenance of bridges over the roads and trestles but he didn't want me for that so much as the Back Shops where I could work my way up, but it wasn't necessary to go into the Back Shops to become a trainman; you could automatically start at the upper level but I wanted to know more about the engines, trains and cars before I went out on the road.

I didn't really hear about any work. I accidentally ran into one when I came here looking for work. About 3 p.m. I was interviewed by a man in the Back Shops by the name of Richard Kenney. He sent me to Dr. Brian uptown on the square for a physical examination and



Roundhouse crew, c. 1920. Those in aprons were fire builders. (McLean County Historical Society)

when I came back at 5:00 with the doctor's results he told me I'd go to work that night at 11:00 p.m.

I and the wife came first and left the two children back with her mother for a week. We lived with my sister's husband's brother and his wife for a week. Then we moved our furniture the following weekend and lived here ever since.

My job entailed cleaning the rods that run from one axle to the other on the engine and they were about 1,000, maybe 1,500 pounds in weight, depending on the size of the engine that the rods were to be put on. To clean those, you had to put them in a vat which had a solution to clean all of the grease and dirt off of them, then you whitewashed them. After they were wiped dry, then you hit them with a hammer. If the whitewash cracked, that was a defective rod and it wouldn't pass inspection to go onto the new engine. If no cracks showed up after hitting it with a heavy hammer, then it was O.K. Those went on the new engine which was on the assembly line. The rods were lifted by small cranes. Some cranes could lift a full-size engine, which is about 198,000 pounds.

I worked about thirty days. I decided then

that I wasn't getting enough work; it was only eight hours a day. I had come from a farm and wanted all the work I could get. They transferred me to the Roundhouse where you worked 13 hours or longer. You were paid time and one-half for anything over 16 hours.

54¢ an hour, which was considered pretty fair at that time. However, inflation came upon us and, at that time, we needed more money to live. I worked all I could. I averaged 16 hours for the first 23 months in the Roundhouse.

The only thing you needed an apprenticeship for is to be a boilermaker or a machinist. The rod inspector had a chance to go into that if he wanted to or the labor department or the trainmen, flagmen or engineers. I chose the labor department and Roundhouse and became an engineer from there. I wasn't guided quite as well as some because I didn't take time to talk—I just worked.

I like to prime engines. When the fireman is promoted, he becomes an engineer. That wasn't my goal, but as a fire builder if I would have stayed, I would have become an engineer.

That was my aim. That wasn't the big goal,

but I always liked to be on the engine, especially as a fireman. Learning how to build a fire on an engine is an art.

The engines were run into the Roundhouse over the pit and you scooped coals by hand from the tender in through the fire box and spread it all over the floor of the fire box, covering it good. Then you throw scoops of shavings in there that were oiled, on top of the coals. Then you light the shavings and keep scooping coal on top of that. It's just like building a charcoal fire to have a hamburger or steak fry. It's very similar to that, only on a much larger scale. Those fire boxes could be seven or eight feet wide and sixteen feet long.

It separated the men from the boys. I, not being a large man, weighing 125 pounds and 5 ft. 6 in. tall, everyone said that "Moore could never do it." I was determined because I worked hard on the farm. I scooped a lot of corn so it was not anything new to me. You might say that I was born and raised with a scoop shovel.

My normal work day started at 11 at night until 7 the next morning. If they asked me to work the daylight shift, I would just continue till 3 in the afternoon. While you were a laborer it didn't matter how many shifts you worked. You'd just continue because there wasn't any law; the Union finally got us a 16-hour per day limit. The first shift was straight time, the second shift was time and one-half, the third shift being your regular shift would only be straight time; three shifts in a row is twenty-four hours. I've done that. They had so much work that you were always busy, so you never really felt sleepy.

First, I lived at 901 South Wright. That's quite a ways from the Shops. I rode a bus for a nickel. Sometimes, if I didn't have a nickel, I walked.

Whistles were quite the thing in those days when the steam trains were there. There was a five-minute whistle before you had to be at work, the one that you had to sign it was next. People used to set their clocks by it because it could be heard for long distances.

We carried a lunch most of the time, but there was a restaurant called The Beanery on West Chestnut Street and a lot of the railroaders ate there. It was just a quick lunch deal, nothing like what you have today like McDonald's or Wendy's. Most of their meals were

boiled in those days, already cooked. You just got a plate lunch, cup of coffee, a piece of pie and go back to work.

Sometimes it was staggered but in the shop they had regular lunch time, 20 minutes to stop and eat. It had to be 5 hours and 40 minutes from the time you started working until the time you got to eat. You'd be surprised how many ate in ten minutes and rested ten minutes and were ready to go back to work. I was quite interested in horseshoes. There was quite a few that beat me. I could compete with most of the better ones. I enjoyed the horseshoes. I sometimes did that over lunch period.

We had a fellow, biggest, hardest fellow you ever saw, he had a habit of getting in other people's dinner buckets before lunch and would eat your meal. Then, at lunch time he would have a chicken dinner ordered from one of those fast food joints that delivered out or he would (I even did this, too) switch lunches from one man's pail to another. Sometimes they would fix their own lunches and know it, but if their wife fixed it they didn't know and would think they were eating what their wife fixed them. We played pranks like that.

Well, I started on my birthday when I was 30 years old, on January 2, 1943, and I worked 11:00 at night at the Back Shop. I was there about two months before I was transferred into the Roundhouse as a laborer; the laborers there at that time built fires in the steam engines, they blew flues, and did cleanup work, cleaned out the pits, run the turntable, serviced the passenger engines at the Depot as they came in and went off and from there, they even became qualified hostlers of engines. That's moving engines from one track to another or even taking them to the Depot to put on faster engines for passenger trains, which was a step up, maybe \$1.00 for that hour's work and that was incentive to work up.

From there, after becoming a qualified hostler I went to brakeman in order to become a fireman in the worst way, but the foreman of the engines didn't want to hire me as a fireman. So, I went braking, although I would rather have been a fireman. That was my first love—I won't go into that! Anyway, I enjoyed braking. When the war was over and the men came back from the service, then I was off five years as I told you and I was called back; they asked me to be brakeman. I asked them if they

needed a switchman, and they said yes, and I said I'd be there at midnight that night. I worked as a switchman until I got hurt in July of 1973 and was forced to retire on account of my accident.

Lay-off

Then I was transfered from there to go out on the road as a brakeman. After three years, the war was over and the boys that were drafted into the service came back. I got laid off for five years and when I was called back to the yards, I went in as a switchman.

I was at the Manufactured Ice Company delivering ice for one year and the rest of the time I was at Normal Sanitary Dairy as a milk seller of commercial milk, which was for hotels, restaurants and grocery stores uptown. I had hopes of being called back.

If you once worked for the railroad, it more or less got in your blood and it was kind of like a coal miner; once a railroader, always a railroader. That's why, if you went looking for other work, you always want to go back to the railroad.

Switchman 1951-1973

Connecting up trains. Trains would come in and they would have to have the boxcars switched from one track to another because the cars would be distributed in different places in town as well as different towns. This was a very large yard and we handled 2,000 or 3,000 cars in an hour, 24 hours a day. We had passenger trains that we had to service too, maybe a coach would have to be taken off or added on. Even engines were transferred, especially as they accumulated many miles and had to be taken into the Back Shops and torn down to be rebuilt.

The diesels were introduced in 1946 to 1949. They were practically all diesels when I started working there again. Later, after I was laid off and became a switchman, then I was a member of the Masonic fraternity. Outside of that, the only other social function that I attended was church . . . United Bretheren on Union and Roosevelt, which is now United Methodist Church.

The most dangerous job that I had was as a switchman. When you're making up trains, you're either foreman, lead man or helper and would have to throw switches for those cars to

go into, and if they were going too fast you would have to run to catch them, put brakes on them to keep them from hitting another car, because some of them carried dynamite or explosives. The explosive cars had red tags on them and you could see them from a good ways off.

I was injured several times. That's what caused me to retire. I got hurt one evening about 7:00 in the yards and fell backwards on the track while it was raining and injured my shoulders, arms, neck and back. I was forced to retire then; I was in traction for five years.

They didn't have insurance but the costs came out of their own pocket. They paid your medical bills and wages while you were off. There was no company that would cover them, not even Lloyd's of London, because it was such a hazardous job. I saw a man get cut in two. It was while I was a switchman.

When you're coupling the cars in the yards there must be gaps between the cars, because he goes in between the cars to open up the knuckle; because they won't connect if both knuckles aren't open, one on each end. He goes in to open up the knuckle, another car came up from behind him and cut him right in two. I've seen legs, arms and fingers cut off, so that's the hazardous part—of being a switchman. Their main stand was "safety first". Safety meetings were once a month with required attendance. I don't think that there was any railroad occupation that did not require safety meetings.

Strikes and Union Membership

Once, after that, when I was switching, we went out at midnight until the same time next night. The President of the United States had an injunction against us because it was declared an emergency and put us back to work. That was over working conditions and wages, that was national. In 1946. I was braking at that time. We had another one later on when I was switching, though that lasted overnight also. I presume it was in the '60s.

Transportation is a big thing in the United States and the President has the power to put an injunction against us to put us back to work until we come to an agreement.

It was what was called a "closed shop". I worked in the Non-operators Union while in the Roundhouse and Back Shop. The Opera-

tors Union was for those who had more training.

Their main aim was not always wages, but also working conditions. At one time, we didn't have what was called "step-on, step-off" here in Bloomington, which was a large terminal. We all went to work here but we were called on passenger trains, which was either working as a conductor or flagman, and you'd get on the train as your shift started and you would up in Chicago or St. Louis and you had to get home on your own. You could drive or take the train free, but they called that "dead head". You spent a lot of time away from home that way. We finally got the "step-on, step-off" in Bloomington as a result of union action, where we worked the full time that we were on the train. The engineers got that first. At first, they got to work as long as they wanted to, but they cut the work day to sixteen hours for brakemen so that one couldn't work more than sixteen hours. Now there is an eight-hour time off.

I was never an officer but attended the required meetings, once every three months at least and they wanted members to attend once a month if possible. We had weekly meetings.

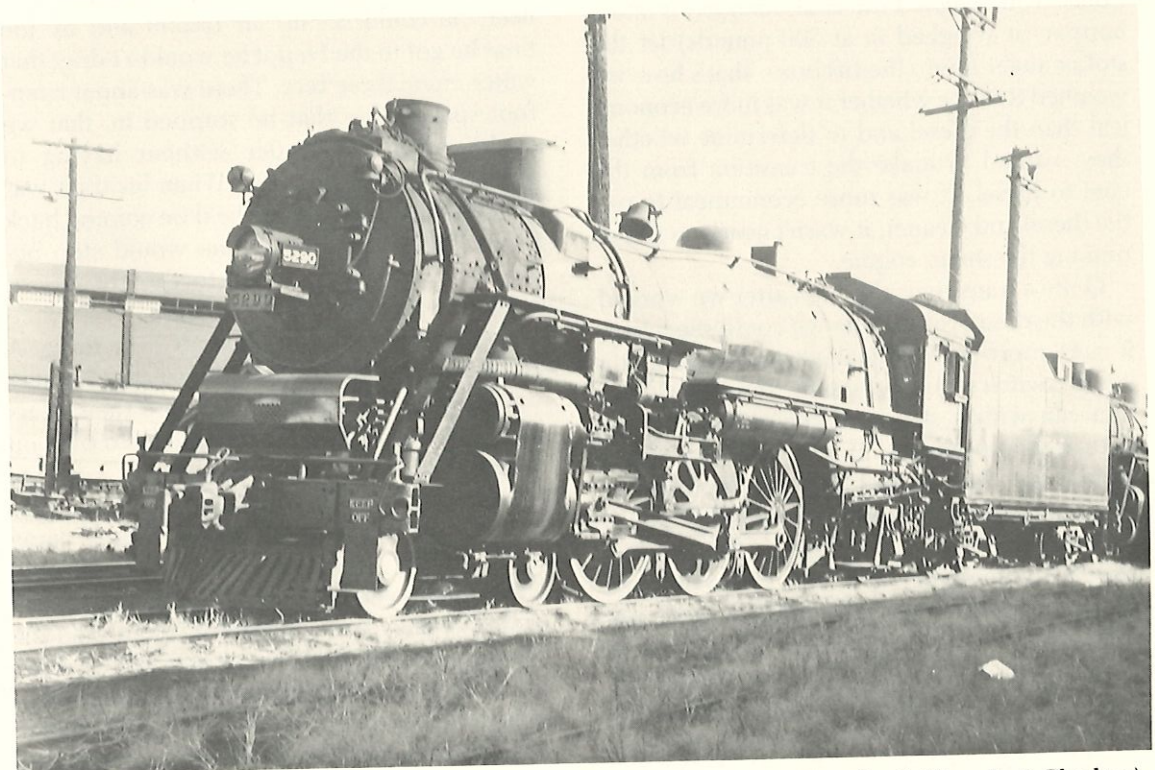
Working conditions were always what we

were hankering about. We were supposed to go to our Union but, sometimes, the Union was a little radical, which I don't care for. I like to bring my problems to the head first, then it was up to the Union to hassle it out. A lot of the fellows didn't like that. I wasn't the most popular laborer or switchman when it comes to that, but I never had any problems with that.

I never had any particular thing that I would go to the Union for. I went to the Union meetings; I might go along with what they said or I might renege if I felt that they weren't being fair. After all, if the company doesn't make money they can't afford to pay anybody, and so who pays the bills? That's one thing that all workers have to remember; someone has to pay the bills. If your company goes broke, you don't have a job. I was never for a raise so much as working conditions. It's kind of hard to get a raise if the company doesn't make money.

End of Steam

The independent railroad is one of the things of the past. That's why the oldtimers liked the old railroads because we worked for the family and as a family. Now, it's like being in the Army; working for the government and they're



Alton passenger engine 5290, late 1940s; these engines and tenders were painted red. (Kenody J. Charlton)

going to tell you what to do. The personal touch isn't there like it was when I started. That's what I liked. We took pride in our work.

To us oldtimers it seems that way, but maybe they're not as bad as we think they are! Sort of like looking back on your children when you've raised them. You look at your grandchildren and you think that your son or daughter ought to correct or discipline the child—the same thing. It's not like it used to be because it was the older the man was in seniority, that was the man who was boss. So you always had someone that was older than you who told you which was right or wrong.

Ninety miles an hour for a steam engine was awfully fast in our day and even today, those tracks weren't made for anything faster. They could build them to go faster like those that Japan or France has. I think that we were the instigators for speed, but are the last ones to do it ourselves; we're lagging. If we get faster service to the public then we'll be back in the ball game.

It's pretty hard to forget the steam days. They were there first and I was on the coal train test as a laborer, but actually they were hiring me in to scoop coal to see how much coal it took between here and Chicago or St. Louis. You weighed the coal, scooped it into a hopper (it weighed in at 300 pounds) let the stoker auger it into the firebox—that's how we weighed it to see whether it was more economical than the diesel and to determine whether they wanted to make the transition from the coal to diesel. It was more economical to run the diesel and cleaner; it wasn't nearly as fun as running the steam engine.

Quite a transition, although after we worked with the diesel for a while we could see where it was more economical, it was faster, you could switch more cars with the diesel than you can with a steam engine and pull more with a diesel engine. If you drove a steam engine like the big ones they ran through the mountains you got more power. We have level ground here, maybe a few slopes, but nothing like the mountains and our steam engines didn't have to be as large as they were out there in the West, the Rockies. But the diesels pulled more cars per engine. If we had forty cars to a steam engine, sometimes sixty at the most, you had an awful large load. A diesel would go seventy-five or more to the engine.

We just tried to keep it at seventy-five. 150-car trains would be too much for a steam engine if they were all loaded. That's why they put on more units on the trains; they put another steam engine on the train, they had to have another crew.

When I was laborer at the Roundhouse we had a job that two of us would go down to the Depot and service passenger engines, such as doing the lubricators, greasing the rods, filling the water tender with water, kicking down the coal for the firemen. When the trains were coming from the south, we could usually tell when they hit the Shirley crossing which engine it was by the whistle. The engines were from 5290, 5291 clear up to 5299 and I'll never forget the 5297 because it had a fog whistle on it and it was a different sound altogether. I could tell every one of them. I liked the 5297 better than any of them.

The crossing had a whistle, then you have one for heigh-ho, one for back-up, one for a stop. When they were whistling for a crossing, you could tell which one that was.

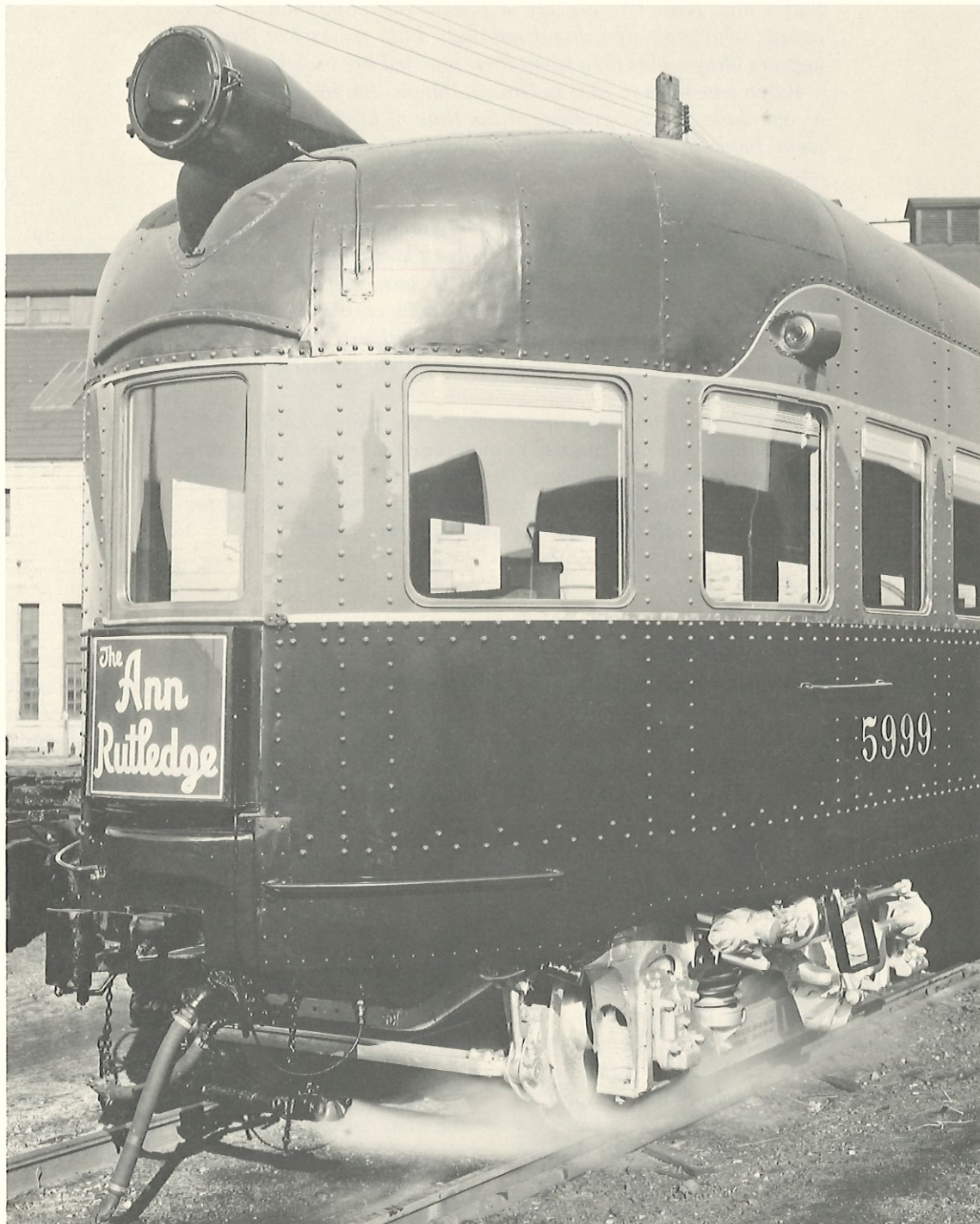
We didn't always guess the engineer but it was pretty much routine with them. Coming down through Normal from the north, I'll never forget Jakey Mose, an awful good engineer, he could set his air brakes and by the time he got to the Depot he wouldn't drag that water crane three feet. There was about a ten-foot space there that he stopped in, that we could water the tender without having to move, so he was an artist. When his train was still moving, many a time he'd be coming back down lighter and the engine would stop because he set the air so perfectly. He retired about the time the diesels came in.

That caused a lot of changes over there. A lot of them retired because they wanted to stay with the steam engines. They had their years in, so why not? Most of them are dead but you might find a few of them around . . . a few firemen are around who had later been promoted, but were firemen when diesels came in. That 5297, I can tell it no matter where it was—it was very similar to the whistle of the Wabash—they had a different sound than the ones on the Nickel Plate or any of the other ones. We could tell which way that the engines were coming in from, the east or west, the Nickel Plate and the New York Central, because they had a different sound than ours did.

I enjoy it; the old steam days are the ones that we remember the best. Of course, the diesel had to come sooner or later. It was cleaner, of course. The steam boys wore a red handkerchief or blue handkerchief around their necks. What was that for, do you know? It was to keep cinders out of their neck. That was

what it was for and was more or less a trademark or tradition of railroaders. All of them wore handkerchiefs around their neck as protection from burning cinders.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte



Observation car on the "Ann Rutledge," late 1940s. (William Dunbar collection)

Ralph & Helen Young

Ralph and Helen Young are a fascinating combination, two people who grew up around railroads, both worked at Bloomington's Shops, plus they spent their married life together.

Ralph was born in 1908 in Girard, Illinois. His father operated a coal chute for locomotives at the time of his birth, then later went back to farming. Ralph received training in electrical engineering, came to the Shops in 1942, became an electrical supervisor and retired in 1972.

Helen was born in Bloomington. Her grandfather was a blacksmith at the Shops and her father was chief clerk. Helen went to work for the railroad in 1926 as a clerk, staying, with one five-year interruption, until 1969. She was employed at a time when there were few women working on the railroad, and had a unique vantage point from her long family connection to the railroad and her father's high position.

They both offer great detail about the Shops, and Helen's story reflects the challenge a woman faced working in the gritty man's world of railroading. Their interview reflects a lot of pride in what the Shops once meant to this community, and the prestige and craft skills that the railroad represented.

Helen's Childhood

I was born on the West Side of Bloomington on West Mulberry Street. Then my father built a home at 405 West Emerson and I lived there. Then I married and moved to 207 West Chestnut. Then across the street to my daughter's home, where I made an apartment. That was 301½ West Chestnut. Then Ralph and I married and moved out here . . . 925 South Vale.

I went to Bloomington Public School and I went to Brown's Business College at night for awhile. When I was going to take up the comptometer work, I found out that the teacher didn't know anything, she had to sit down and learn it with me. So I decided there was no need paying for somebody else to learn. That's when I went to Peoria and got the comptometer, they had a school over there, a business school. Oh, there is all different kinds that we had, those electric ones that we had, those are easier to operate than a mechanical or hand one. I trained myself in comptometer work. I

went to Peoria and secured a comptometer and brought it home and practiced on it at night until I became proficient at it and could hold a job. It's a mechanical machine that adds, subtracts, divides etc. according to the knowledge of the operator.

I can't remember Dad ever being laid off. No, but as I said, he was in sort of an appointed position. He was the chief clerk in the office and just wasn't subject to layoffs. Now, the ones under him would get laid off. He put in 45½ years, I don't know how many years ahead of that his father worked for the railroad, until his hand condition forced him to retire.

They heated everything in big furnaces and the tongs, the long tongs, that they had to hold the material would get so hot that they finally gnarled his (her grandfather's) hands till they got so gnarled that he couldn't work any longer.

People in those days would save their money.

They didn't go out and buy a second car or a yacht or a fur coat or something like that. They had bank accounts, they had a little bit laid by and they went out and got other jobs and worked anything they could get to tide themselves over. If they made \$5, \$1 of that went into savings accounts.

I remember my father making a remark one time that there were 4,000 employees down there. They worked around the clock, that was during the war years—must have been during the First World War. There were 4,000 employees and now you don't have any. That is why it is so tragic to a city like Bloomington, as I told you that was the source of payroll for the city for years and years and years.

The Hungarian people and German people and Irish people down on the West Side, they all had their section. That was where most of your railroaders were. Well of course, as time went on they branched out and spread a little bit east, around Oak and Mason and Lee and Roosevelt and started coming east, but the nucleus of the railroad was in the Forty Acres.

Management never gets too friendly with workers. We had some very nice superintendents and general management, and then we had some others we didn't like. But they usually came up through the ranks some way,

especially in the later years. Railroads have been dying for a number of years, but nobody wanted to believe it.

Ralph's Childhood

My father was born in this country, but my grandfather came from Holland. They were farmers, but I don't know really just how Dad did get started on the railroad. He worked at a coal chute between Girard and Virden for, I don't know, quite a few years and then he went back to farming. These passenger trains or any steam locomotives going by would sometimes stop and they would take coal or water. They had a big pond there and he saw that the tank was full of water and they had plenty of coal on hand and he would have to fill the coal tender on the locomotive and at the same time put in water.

I am going to say in 1907 and part of 1908. He was working there when he and mother were married and shortly after I was born about nine months later. Then he went to farming. They were married in September. And he worked through the next September and then in the Spring of 1909 he went to farming.

He made the only bicycle that rode the rails. He lived in Girard and he had three miles to go



C&A coal chute, Varna, Ill., c. 1919. (William Dunbar collection)

north between Girard and Virden, and he stored his bicycle in a freight house in Girard 'cause he lived in Girard. He'd come down in the morning and get on that bicycle and ride it to his work, and then ride back. Now, he had two shafts that went across to the opposite rails with flanged wheels on it and that's what guided it. He just sat there and pumped, he didn't have to guide it or anything. I never did see it. I saw a picture of it once and I don't know what ever happened to the picture, but it was at that time, was the only one made. Dad was quite a mechanic and he had made that himself.

Strike Violence

They had a lot of trouble at Virden. There was a man or two killed down there by rifle fire. They were trying to pick up the coal and the coalminers were not on strike. It was the railroaders. The railroaders had to throw some switches in order to get in there to pick up the cars of coal and one or two of the men, they were switchmen, were throwing switches so the engine could go in there and pick up the cars of coal when someone, they thought out of the coal tipple, that was the tower, the high part of the coal mine, shot and killed him as he was throwing the switch. I remember that as a boy. Then, two miles north of Virden, they did the same thing there. I remember that by reading and hearing about Bloomington. I didn't live in Bloomington then. I was living down by Girard when this all took place.

I didn't come to Bloomington until 1932. I got out of school in 1930. I worked on the farm with Dad for a while. I helped him and also did some electrical work for my own. I then came to Bloomington in 1932. I was an engineer out here at the Ice Plant for eight years.

Helen's Work

I started out as an assistant payroll clerk. Then I worked in the car foreman's office. Then I went into the Accounting Department and did accounting work. I did clerical work in another office and wound up secretary to the division accountant and secretary to the general car foreman. I don't think I was paid by the hour; I think it was by the month and it was around \$80.00 a month. I wasn't married and I was living at home so I didn't have much in the way of expense.

Well, when you first started out as payroll, of course, that is just simply your mathematical knowledge and being able to take care of payrolls for men. Then your shorthand and typing helped you, then I became a comptometer operator. It is a calculating machine and I worked on that for a number of years, but, of course, you had certain programs, certain things that you did every month. Same thing over and over and over, and there are so many different jobs in a railroad office, in the large offices, especially where you have forty or fifty employees and you place yourself on jobs according to seniority.

I started out six days a week. As long as you have men working you have payrolls, you know. And everything is done everyday. Same procedure perhaps, then twice a month when it came time to make out the payroll, they were figured here and sent to Chicago. And they wrote the checks and sent them back down here. There were lots of men in the office. Some treated me very nice and others not so nice. There's a lot of agitation on the railroad. A lot of back-knifing.

They checked up on your work and kind of ganged together against you and made complaints to the bosses. They didn't get very far, but they tried to make life miserable for you, if they could. They were fellow workers. I can recall at one time, seven or eight of the men ganged together and went in to the chief clerk about a mistake I had made in figuring one of their time books. And of course, he laughed at them and asked them if they had never made a mistake. Well, they said that they supposed they had, so he said, "Well, get back out and sit down." This is just pettiness, things like that. If you do a good job your supervisor is going to support you. Anybody will make a mistake now and then, especially if you are operating a machine.

My father was the chief, he was the head of the Accounting Department when I first went there to work and that sort of antagonized some of the other workers. They thought I might be shown partiality. I was, but it went the opposite way. Every noon hour I got the dickens for what everybody else in the office had done wrong. It isn't always pleasant to work for your own family.

Of course, I got teased a lot because I was in a man's occupation. Railroading is usually thought of as a man's department. They teased

the life out of me. One thing or another. My boss said one time "It is a good thing you have a good sense of humor."

The first year I worked my job was abolished and I had to transfer to the Depot. I don't think I was down there more than two or three months though. And then back to my original post. And one time they were going to cut off jobs in our office, and I was a Comptometer operator and we had three or four others and the boss particularly wanted to keep one of them who was very good—but he couldn't do it unless he could divide up our time, so we each gave up a week per month of our own time so that she could work three or four weeks a month.

Layoffs

It was hard work. If you could work for a railroad, you could work for anybody! Any place! That was demonstrated during one of our layoffs. Early layoffs. Some of our people in the office were laid off and they immediately went right out to State Farm or some place else here in town and got jobs . . . when they were turning other people away. Another thing we used to do is that we used to figure inventory for the stores in the city, at night and on week-ends. This was once a year. Moonlighting, yes. Comptometer operators, especially, were scarce in the town and these people had to have their inventory figured and in a short length of time, and they didn't know where to go to get the help so they would call the railroad and we girls would go down and figure their inventory for them. If you've got the confidence of people in the town, businessmen in the town, to do work for them when you are working for someone else, I think you have to be a little bit proud.

I don't really remember how long we did that but it was quite a spell. A year or so anyway, I would say. Railroads are funny places, they'll lay off and then they will call back, then they'll lay off and call back. They are sort of erratic, if they are losing money they will make big slashes and cut off a lot of jobs and pretty soon something happens and they have to have more workers and they call them back. You usually waited to be called back. And there was no such thing as unemployment in those days either . . . you just rode it out. Well, clerical jobs and different jobs carried different

rates according to where they were and what the requirements of the job were. I finally one time made a change from a private secretary to a bill clerk to get maybe \$20 more a month. It was dog-eat-dog back in those railroad days.

We worked for peanuts compared with what they get nowadays. We would get a raise, we'd get two or three cents an hour. We'd have to go on strike and fight for it—to get one or two cents an hour; now they get ten percent, plus a lot of fringe benefits, and that is why your rates are so high.

GM & O

Then the GM & O come in. And they were based in Mobile, Alabama. They were moving the entire office that I was in to Mobile. Well, I didn't want to go, I had a home here and I was raising my daughter and she didn't want to go. She didn't want to leave her schoolmates. So I severed my relationship with the railroad, but five years later I went back in on another job. I had lost everything. But then I went in on another job and stayed until I retired.

There were days that I worked a lot more than ten hours a day. I had a payroll job, I used to do the payroll at night at home. Take it down at midnight and put it on the train so it would get to Mobile the next morning. Just to expedite payroll work. And they at times came up with certain, they had a suit one time about something and when it was settled, we all worked, not all but most of us, worked overtime. I worked on Easter Sunday. I've worked a lot of Sundays and Saturdays that weren't in your scheduled work, but in order to get the thing expedited. You posted time slips from the men that worked in the department, keep their time and at the end of two weeks you figure up their amount due and it's sent on in to the Head Payroll Office where they write the checks. The last job that I was on is where I had to send my payroll to Mobile; I would take my work home when it came that payroll time and do it at home. And at midnight I would have to go down to the Depot by myself to mail the work in to Mobile. Those days I would work maybe fourteen or fifteen hours. From 7 in the morning until midnight.

I was secretary to the general freightcar foreman, secretarial work and a lot of reports, payroll work, that's about it, just general office work. I was the only one other than the fore-



Office, Helen Young at right, February 1957. (McLean County Historical Society)

man in the little office that I was in. But I couldn't say how many were on the railroad. It was a pretty good force. I had over one hundred men in the Car Department and there was more than that in the Locomotive, I guess, and the Engine House. Oh, any how, there was 1,000 or 1,200.

When I see these plush offices that the gals work in and the salaries they get and all of the fringe benefits and think what I went through . . . I worked in a little house that was nothing more than a shed. You couldn't keep it cool in the summer and you couldn't keep it warm in the winter. Many of times I worked with my coat on. When you put up with what I put up with those 39 years and then see what they have now . . . it's just unbelievable. In the summertime an ordinary house dress was what you wore. Of course, in those days there was no such thing as slacks, or jeans or anything like that.

Every job has its good and its bad. And I don't think there is any way that you could have rated a job. Maybe you had an antagonistic boss and the work was alright or you had a good boss and the work was not to your liking. But I always loved accounting and payroll work. Oh, I laugh when I see the kids, well not just kids, everybody pulls out a computer. If somebody comes to the house to sell you insurance; they've got a computer. Income tax people have computers. That's for the birds!

It's different than working for other places. It gets in your blood; once a railroader, you are always a railroader. There is something attractive about it. Used to be of course, now it isn't, the railroads are down. There is nothing now. But in the heyday, when railroads were in the peak of their time, you know you are doing a worthwhile job regardless of what you are doing. Because you are not kept, you don't have a job if there is no real demand, if it

becomes a little bit slack or something your job is cut off—you're laid off.

Ralph's Work

I had a lot of training. I had schooling. I studied electrical engineering. I studied in Chicago at the Chicago Engineering Works. That was run by Northwestern University. And then I had time to do some electrical work on my home because it was at the height of the Depression. When I got the chance to go to the railroad, I went out there.

When I first started there was a lot of foreign people who worked out there. The Germans were mechanics. A lot of them couldn't speak English when I was there. They were the mechanics, the original railroaders. They could just take a piece of steel and make most anything out of it. And they all settled out on what we called Forty Acres. That was west of the Shops. That is still known as Forty Acres or the West Side. In those days it was called Forty Acres. They have their homes there and a lot of them are still living out there. They used to have gangs like Chicago. This was at night. They got along on the job, but look out when that whistle blew. Step foot off of that railroad property and you might be in for it. We had a lot of trouble. That all happened before my time. I would say 1915 or so.

We didn't have any diesel locomotives when I first went out there. But, I was there about three years maybe, and they got one diesel locomotive. It was used on the passenger train. We didn't see too much of it at the shop, only just once in a great while when they would bring it in for a repair of some sort that they couldn't do at the terminal. But, in 1946 they dieselized the whole road. They then shut the shop down for five days. That was the time I was laid off for five days. They then called a few back at a time. They never did bring back the full force. Well, they didn't need the Boiler Shop. They didn't have to have the whole Boiler Shop crew then. The steam locomotive had a lot of machine work on it. The Electrical Department was rather small at that time because we didn't have too much electrical work on the steam locomotives. We had the headlight, the turbine and you had a couple, three lights on that steam engine and that's all we had. Of course, we had to renew that wiring every time it went through the shop for a

complete overhaul. That steam locomotive was so hot, ordinary insulation wire wouldn't last, so we used asbestos wire. When the diesel locomotive came they put more workers on because there was a lot more electrical work to be done.

They always worked six days a week around the clock. And when they first started to work out here, that's what the workmen worked—seven days a week. I never did work seven, I've worked six, I've never worked seven. Only in an overtime capacity or something like that, of course. Then we went to a five day week or six day week, then we went to a five day week, then we went to an eight hour day. The days were always ten hours up until then. Then we went to an eight hour day, then we went from an hour lunch, we went to a half hour for lunch and got off work at 3:30 instead of 4:00. Much as we like progress, or good progress.

That was the 150-ton crane. We used to ride that thing, we had big 300-watt lights up there, they were in rows of three, every 35 feet apart. And the electrician would come down there after hours, when the shop wasn't working, like on Sunday maybe or in the evening when it wasn't too busy, and there would be a couple or three of us electricians, generally three because we would each take a row, three rows in the length of that shop. And that shop building itself was over a block long and we would ride that big crane, way up there in the air and put those lights in. And wash them, twice a year we would wash those shades.

Safety

When maybe something went wrong with the crane, then we electricians had to get up there and get that thing rollin', get that down out of the air, but other than that no, I would say they were pretty safety-minded all through my years out there, and I understand before my years. They were safety-minded. You would never have walked under one of those locomotives while it was in the air. That was a no-no and that was, well that was just a stern rule, and before, if men were talking and they didn't see the crane operator coming with that locomotive he would stop before he'd pass over, and he always had a bell and when he went to move that crane, he was ringing that bell all the time, continuously, while he was

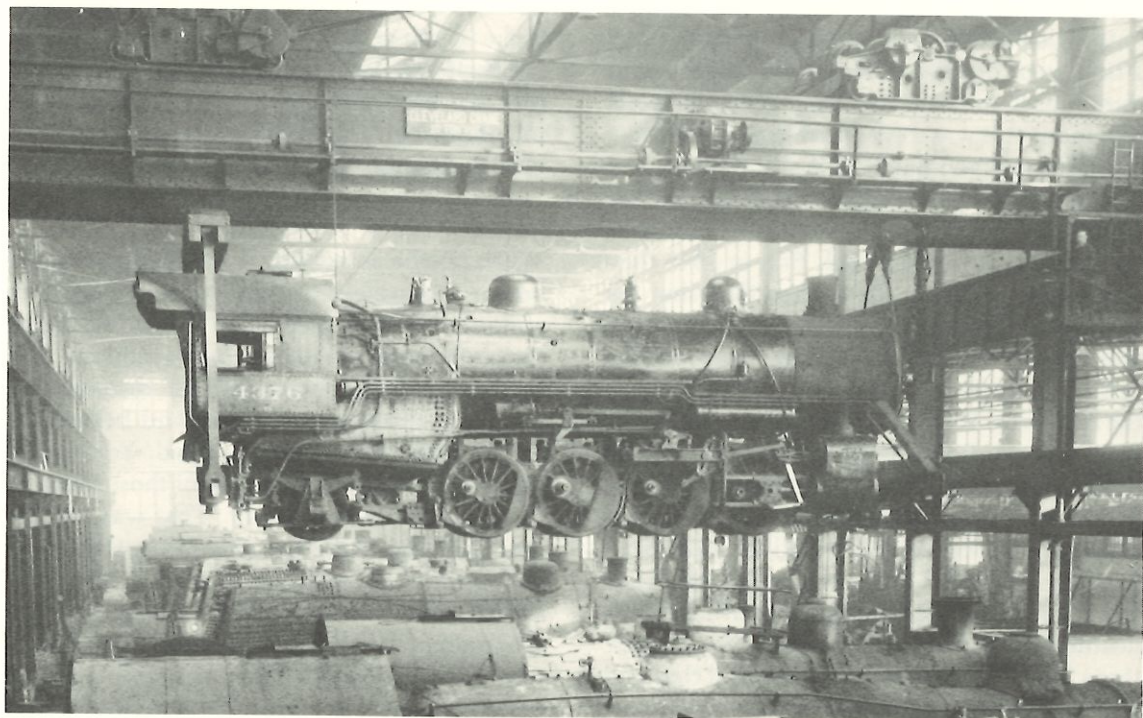
moving. And if he put pressure on it, it really rang and that's when you knew something was wrong, like maybe a couple of fellows was standing there talking, wasn't paying any attention what was going on and he was about to come over them, why he would really tear that bell off the wall.

We started having safety meetings every month. I was safety chairman out there for several years. When something would happen, the National Railroad Safety, we would get pamphlets from them. We joined up with them. They would send us pictures of accidents that happened at other railroads and we would all talk about those and things like that. We finally got down to where we wouldn't have too many accidents. Nothing compared to what we would have before. We kept a record of all accidents that happened out there. And they (National Railroad Safety), if a man would get injured and just required first aid, that wasn't considered an accident. But, if he lost work, then it became a casualty, so to speak. And different railroads that belonged to this National Railroad Safety Committee would compare their railroads with other railroads. There was always a first place that everyone was after. And we hit it a time or two. It really helped. It kept the accidents down.

Well, I had a man fall off the pole one time. He went about thirty feet into the air and he fell from that. He had no broken bones. He was off work for about three or four days. I also had another fellow put in the hospital with an electric shock, twenty-three volts. It just knocked him down. We were at the hospital. He was in there a couple or three days. Yeah, there were a lot of injuries. Cuts and burns, eye injuries, etc.

We had a man and we called him "Doc" (George) Carruthers. He was our first-aid manager. He was out there for years and years. He was a former Red Cross worker. He had Red Cross lessons out there. He was very high up in the Red Cross. I also went to those lessons. That is where I learned my first-aid. When he wasn't too busy he worked in an office. He had some little job in there that he had to keep up. But, if anything happened, especially around the shop, he was always prompt. There was one in the Car Department and no matter what happened he would put iodine on it.

I had a fellow who was an elderly man who worked for me. We had what we called the "plug" that left Bloomington Depot every morning, that went to Kansas City. There were two. One each way a day. One going the



The 150-ton crane lifting engine 4376, April 1936. (Pantagraph photo)

opposite direction of the other. Well, we had to service that. We would carry the electric things. We had a generator underneath the car. We had to go down and check that every morning.

Well, one morning they forgot about looking under there. This fellow was still under there checking it out. We started moving out and he grabbed the underneath trussrods of that coach and rode it from the Depot to Funk's Seed Company down there, which was about a quarter of a mile. He was screaming and hollering. Finally, the conductor or someone heard this. Of course, the conductor had the control of the train and could stop it on the instant, as far as the brakes were concerned. All he had to do was to pull the emergency cord and he did that. Here was Mr. Walsh, the man who was working for us. He was hanging down there. We didn't send him down there anymore after that. He wouldn't go under there.

But, as far as safety, we met a lot of trains at that Depot and we would have to get underneath the coach. Our safety program called for someone, and it was usually me, if I was there, to go to the engineer and get a little bit of a lever that was removable, and without that lever you couldn't move that train. I would go to the engineer and get that little lever. We called it the reversing lever, of course. I would stick it in my pocket. And only me could take that back to him and give it to him.

They had numerous safety procedures on the railroad. We had the blue flag, the torpedos. Now, the torpedos were fastened onto the rail and held there and was used for several different purposes. One of them was a safety item and another was to signal the engineer that something was in the future, in the far distance.

State Fair

I used to go to Springfield to the State Fair. Those were those long, hard days. That was no fun. Hard work. We would stay with the train. We would never go to the Fair. On the east side of the Springfield Fairgrounds the railroad had three or four tracks that were the whole length of the Fairground. We used to park all the cars there. The week previous to the opening of the Fair, we would always send to Springfield a lot of battery charging equipment. We would have to go down there and

set up all of this equipment, because maybe some of those coaches with dead batteries would be there. And those hot summer months and if you wouldn't have air-conditioning, those delegates would really cut your throat, you know. We would take a bunch of men when we would go.

If everything was working you would have a fine and dandy day. There was drink and sandwiches. I wasn't a drinker. But, the sandwiches were real good. They were all in pretty good shape. There was a ladies' coach. When everyone came back from the Fair, they would not be in such good shape.

You know how the weather is in August. Oh boy!! And some of those people, you would no more than recognize them when they would come back. Maybe their clothes would be disarrayed and their hair would be all up on end. I'll tell you it was something. We fellows used to get a big bang out of it.

That was a sight to see when you got to Springfield. I would have hated to be a car cleaner, or a coach cleaner is what we used to call them then in those days. It would be a real mess, tin cans and paper and parts of sandwiches all over the place. It was something. I will never forget one of them. Me and another fellow went on to Joliet. Oh boy, what a car! We would be going north and there would be a train coming from Chicago going south and we would wait for five or ten minutes and catch it. It is quite a life, very interesting. But, I am glad it is over with.

I tell you, I always enjoyed working and the finer the work the better I like it, I like to use my fingers. And that was the type of job that I guess they saw what I liked and that's what I got. A lot of that real fine work, I used material where I had to use a magnifying glass in order to see it, the wires were so fine. Well, sure, I've used that a lot on coils and contacts and things like that and I enjoy that. As far as personally, that would be my type of fun.

Supervisor

I was there for about four and one-half years and then they made me an electrical supervisor. At one time I had twenty-eight men working under my supervision. But, for the first four-and-a-half, of course, I was working under someone else's supervision. Anything electrical like from climbing poles to doing powerline

work to benchwork, which was sometimes very small motors and things like that, or construction.

I was supervisor of the Electrical Department the last 26 years. I had the Parts Department, I had the Tin Department sometimes. You're the guy who gets all the hell whenever any is passed out, and you take all of that for all of your whole department, and there are lots of headaches, lots of study, lots of thinking to be done. I was on call twenty-four hours and a lot of times I would sit down for a meal and just get sit down and the telephone would ring, I was supposed to go in, but I generally finished my meal because I knew it wouldn't stay warm.

I enjoyed my job very much. I enjoyed supervision very much and just working when I was working. Of course after I got to be a supervisor I couldn't do anything other than supervise. The only tool I could carry was a flashlight. I couldn't do any work unless I had a fellow right there watching me that was compensated. The last few years I was out there, the boys didn't pay too much attention to it. I didn't have any trouble with my fellows. I would get into arguments with them once in a while, of course.

I was never able to forget when I was a workman and I wanted to be treated a certain way and that was how I tried to treat them. I never had any trouble. My men had a lot of respect for me. A lot of the other supervisors were not as well liked. I really enjoyed my work, even though I was on call twenty-four hours a day. A lot of times that I wanted to do something for my children, my family and I couldn't because I was on call day, night, all hours of the day. Saturday and Sunday were the rest days, so to speak, each week. A lot of times I had to work on those days. There was one time that I didn't see my house in daylight for three months. This was before I became supervisor. I was leaving before sunlight and getting home after sundown. And that was the way we worked.

My wife's father came to stay with us all night and he made the statement that this would be a nice night to get called out. It was snowing and storming, just awful. Well, at 2 a.m. I was called out and I didn't know whether I could get out there. I got going and found that I had to take a different route

because the Square was all blocked off with fire department, etc. I finally got there and got the job done. I knew I couldn't go back the same way I came, so I had to take a different route. With the snow and all it wasn't easy! I then found my way home and it was about 5 or 5:30 in the morning. The next morning her father says to her, "Where is Ralph?" And she told him that he was still in bed. He thought it was kind of late to still be in bed. Well, when he heard I was out until 5:30 a.m. he got a big bang out of that. I didn't, but that was the job . . . had to go.

I do like my own independence. Well, you have to be independent when you are a supervisor. Your patience and your ideas, you would be surprised what these fellows come to you about. Some of it is their own private and home life. You try to advise them. It always made me feel good when they came to me about things like that because it proved to me they had confidence in me.

I would loan them money, then would try to get it back. I never did lose anything with anybody that I can remember. There was a time or two when I got a little worried and I had a little trouble getting my money back, but I finally got it. I had a fellow start work for me at one time. He was supposed to have had two years of college and I just got him down there for an interview. And I just gave him the devil because he didn't finish his college. And he said to me, "Mr. Young" . . . He never called me by my first name. Never. For as long as he was there. He always called me "Mr. Young." He said, "Mr. Young, I want to tell you something. When the lovebug bites you, it causes you to do a lot of things that you don't really want to do." It meant he fell in love, he was in college in Missouri. He fell in love and they got married and then she got pregnant right away, of course. And he had to go to work.

And the first week he was there he wanted to borrow some money. He said he would pay me back payday. Well, he wouldn't get a paycheck for at least three weeks after he started there. You were paid every two weeks. But, the first two weeks you were there you don't get a paycheck, you see. So, when payday did come he came to me and paid me half. And he paid me half the next payday. Since that time he borrowed from me several times, and he was a good guy and I enjoyed helping him out.

One time it was the house rent. Another time it was a car payment. I don't know what all he was behind on. There was another guy out there who borrowed \$50 from me and was supposed to pay me back half of it in the next two paydays. Well, it was five or six months before I ever got my money back out of him. But, I finally got it. One fellow I knew was having family trouble. He and his wife were having trouble. He came to me and eventually she came to me. And those are the kinds of things that you run into if they have confidence.

There are many facets of railroading. I don't know why it gets my blood the way it does and it never leaves. But, I would give anything to hear an old steam engine whistle again, but the only way I can hear it now that I know of is through my records that I have here. I understand there is a little railroad in Colorado is still steam engine. But finally last year they converted it to diesel, too. There are very few of them anymore. In West Virginia, in the heart of the coal mines, they have diesel down there. I never thought they would allow them there because it is the heart of coal mining. They used to have some big locomotives down there. Ohio was one of the main places for steam locomotives. They had some monstrous ones.

It certainly was an experience. But, I wouldn't want to go back. If it was like it was I still wouldn't want to go back. And I know I wouldn't want to go back now because there wouldn't be anything interesting.

Union Involvement

Ralph: I belonged to the IBEW or the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. I was there for six months and then they wanted me to join them and I joined at that time. Yes, I was never president of that Union, but I was secretary-treasurer.

It would have been about three years and they made me a supervisor and I couldn't carry an office in the local Union so I had to give it up, and that was about 1944.

Well, for the local treasury I counted their money of course. I would then send it in to the International office. And as a secretary you keep records of members, notifications of different changes in the by-laws or something like that. That's about all I had to do then. We met

once a month. I don't remember who the president was at that time. Charlie Ernst belonged to the Union at that time, was president and was a crane operator in the shop.

Helen: I can't tell you when I joined a union. I think not until it became a closed shop and we had to belong. Evergreen Lodge, a clerk's union. BRAC, which is Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks. And ours is Evergreen 459.

Ralph: If it wasn't for the unions, any kind of union, now-a-days we'd all be slaves, we know that, but I can't say that I'd go along with certain things that they do to a certain extent, but if it wasn't for organized labor we'd all be slaves.

We had people in different unions. We had our Supervisors Union, but I always kept up my Electrical Union and I get a pension from that Electrical Union now, but I don't get any from the Supervisors Union, although I'm a life member since I retired.

Social Activity

Helen: After the B & O came in they had a Women's Auxilliary that took up some of our time. They used to have card parties and dances, they weren't too often. But you don't think about fun when you work for a railroad, 'cause there isn't any.

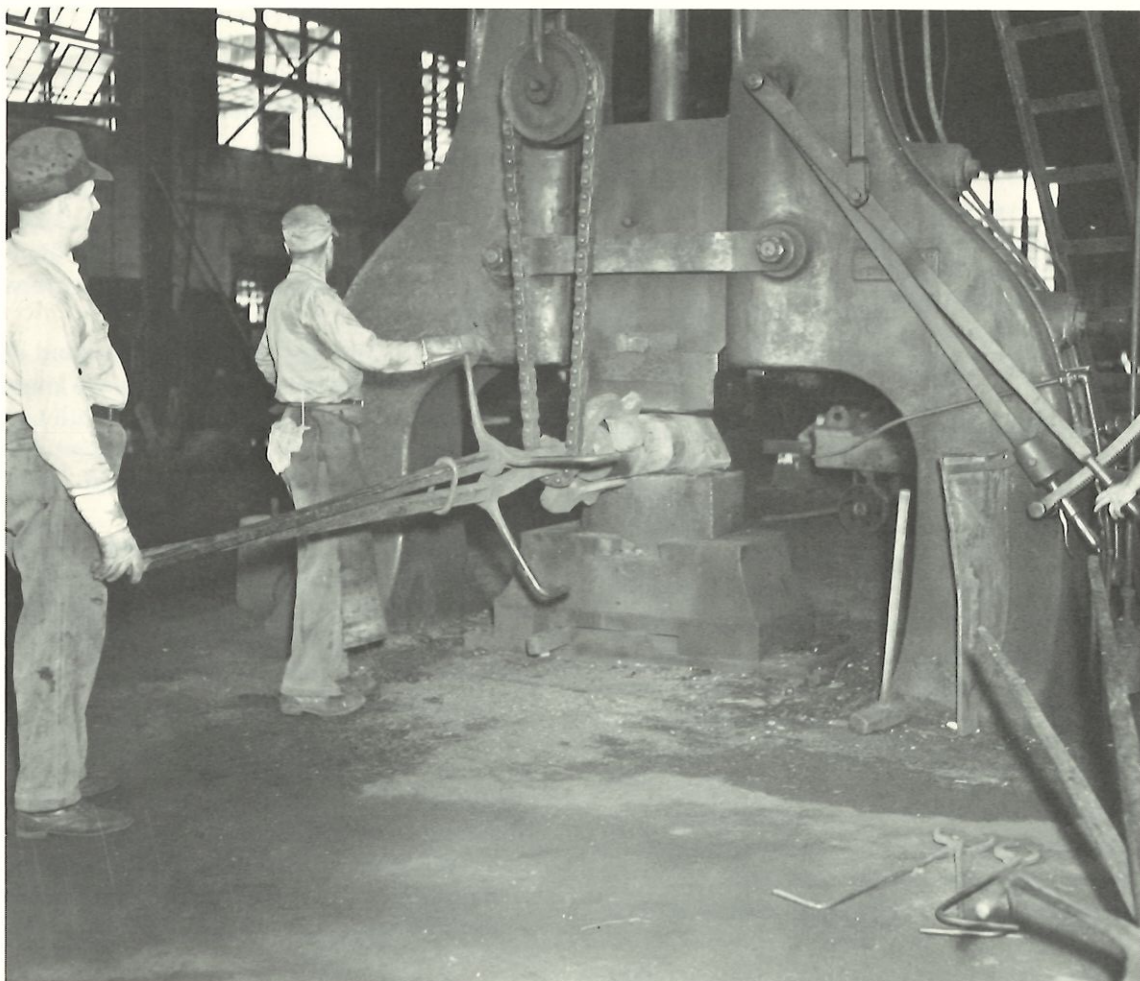
Ralph: I pitched a lot of horseshoes at the noon hour. One time when I was still at home I won a blue ribbon for pitching horseshoes at the State Fair in my age group, which was 17 to 19.

This is a secret. Do you know what Helen's nickname was out on the railroad? "Mighty Mouse". One time Mrs. Young was in the hospital and they sent flowers to her. Well, they sent them to "Mighty Mouse".

Helen: You have to learn to take teasing. You have to give it right back to them. I saw a fellow from the railroad and he was talking about it being the first time he ever called me "Mrs. Young." He always called me "Helen." He and I were always at each other's throats. He was a chairman of the lodge and he was one to object with things. Well, we had to talk it out.

Remembering the Shops

Ralph: Railroading is a special thing all on its own. And you can't read it, you can't get it out



Pounding a billet on the drop forge, J. P. Williams, a "beater" (left) and Rudy Ratz, hammersmith, September 1939. (Pantagraph photo)

of a book, you can't pick it off the street, you just have to have the experience. And someone is dedicated, it gets in your blood. We have a few records with the old steam-engine whistles and they make cold chills up and down your back when you hear them. They tried to duplicate them with air and it can't be done. You have to have the power to do it with steam in order to get that whistle. And some of them would be a single tone. We used to have a fire whistle that stood four feet high. It had three whistles on it and they would all blow at the same time to get the tone that they wanted.

You could hear it miles. We could hear those whistles from here, though. We would always blow it on Friday evening and then again at least once a month to test it and our fire department. I was fire chief out there for quite a while and I was safety committeeman out there for years. We would always check out

the fire whistle. We had twenty-four fire stations around the Shop area. Each station was numbered from one to twenty-four and whatever button you pushed, that was the fire station that would come.

Helen: When steam locomotives went out they didn't have to do all the blacksmith work. See, they were making pieces, they were forging pieces for steam locomotives, maybe a draw bar or a, oh, I don't know all the names of the parts, they made then.

Ralph: They were, I think, billets, billets, they called them, of iron and they would take them into the Blacksmith Shop and put them in these big furnaces and keep it red hot, and then they would pound it out.

It had some of the largest pieces of machinery located out there at the shop. They used to get these big billets of iron. I don't know how

many tons they weighed, but they would heat it in the furnace out there and get them cherry red and put them under this big hammer. When that hammer went to work, it shook the whole shop area. You could just feel everytime it struck. You could feel the ground quiver.

We had the big Machine Shop out there and now it is Owens-Corning. We had a Machine Shop in there. We had a Boiler Shop. There were five different bays in there and each bay a little different.

We used to make our own tank cars that you see today. We had the largest boiler plate in the U.S. We had machines that would take a big sheet of metal which would be about $\frac{1}{2}$ to maybe $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch thick, which would weigh tons, and when we were done with it, it would be in the shape of a tank or a circle. And then they had another machine that made all of the different cars.

I can remember this elderly boiler maker that we had down there. He could beat any man I ever saw and he was a mechanic. He was a master at his trade. You know these cow-catchers in front of a diesel locomotive? They are beveled, they are round, slope out and I've seen that man take a big sheet of metal $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch thick and he'd have four or five people helping him. And they would all have big heavy torches and heating that iron and he would start beating that iron, but you, well I just couldn't see it, of course, it wasn't pointed at me, but I couldn't see what in the world that man was doing but he was the one doing all of the hammering. And when he got through with that and he said to the other fellows, "Let's go try it", they took it in there and the thing almost fit in the corners. And that was all riveted onto the diesel trains in the front and he would measure each one of those holes, and then go back to the punch press and then punch the metal, punch a hole in that metal, take it up there and as far as I can remember, I can only remember one time that they ever had to ream out one hole out of about forty-two that was in around the front of that. They all just fit right in.

Helen: We had a Upholstery Shop, we had a Paint Shop, we had a Car Shop. That took care of your passenger cars, then there was a Freight Shop where they made freight cars and repaired those. You had your Pattern Shop where they cut out and made the patterns for these

things, they had the Planing Mill where they planed the wood to make whatever they were making; then, in your end of it, of course, in the Car Shop, there was a Pipe and Tin Shop and naturally you had your Power House and your Foundry and your Blacksmith and your Fire Shop and your Machine Shop.

Ralph: And we had a Pipe Shop down there—we had two Pipe Shops.

Helen: There was a pride in workmanship on the railroads years ago.

Ralph: You never found it any place else. No, sir.

Helen: Even those cabinet makers, the pieces, the inlay that they had. Your dining car tables and things and sides of cars. It was just perfection, everybody took pride in their work; after a time that began sliding. They had some of the best mechanics in all trades right here in the Shops you could find any place in the world. But you take we got an awful lot of Germans out there, and the German people are mechanics. And don't you ever think they aren't and they are that way yet today. Lots of our techniques and a lot of our way of making things has come from Germany. The first dining car was made in the shop here.

Ralph: Oh, yes. The first Pullman car was made right out here.

Helen: When that Red Train was put together, they got that out on the tracks assembled before they put it out on the rails.

Ralph: There are more pictures of that Red Train in the United States than all the other trains put together.

Helen: The most beautiful train.

Ralph: In that day they (the engines) were black and when they put this one out it was the first red one, and it was a beauty. It was gold trimmed! It was all decorated with special carpeting, special fixtures. They had special people come over and painted those fixtures in the dining car. Was he from Austria?

Helen: I don't know.

Ralph: He was from a foreign country. Came over here especially to paint the fixtures in the dining car.

Helen: That car, or uh, that train was taken . . .

Ralph: On a tour, wasn't it?

Helen: Overseas. Wasn't it?

Ralph: Yes. England, France, several countries involved. There was Switzerland? I don't know whether it went through Germany or not, but it was taken overseas, I know.

Helen: Then when the B & O came in they had a blue . . .

Ralph: Ya, they had a blue engine.

A new fellow starting railroading today with the diesel locomotive would not get the fever, railroad fever so to speak, that you would get in those steam engine days. That old steam engine whistle, and I don't care where it was and you just could hear it far away. I got one of those records here, I'll tell you it is really something, make a chill run up and down my spine when I hear it. And there was just a fascination about the old steam engine that you never get out of a diesel locomotive and you never will because it isn't there, even the whistle, they can't match the old steam whistle. They've tried with air and steam both, but they still haven't developed that old steam whistle. That was sound all by itself.

Retirement

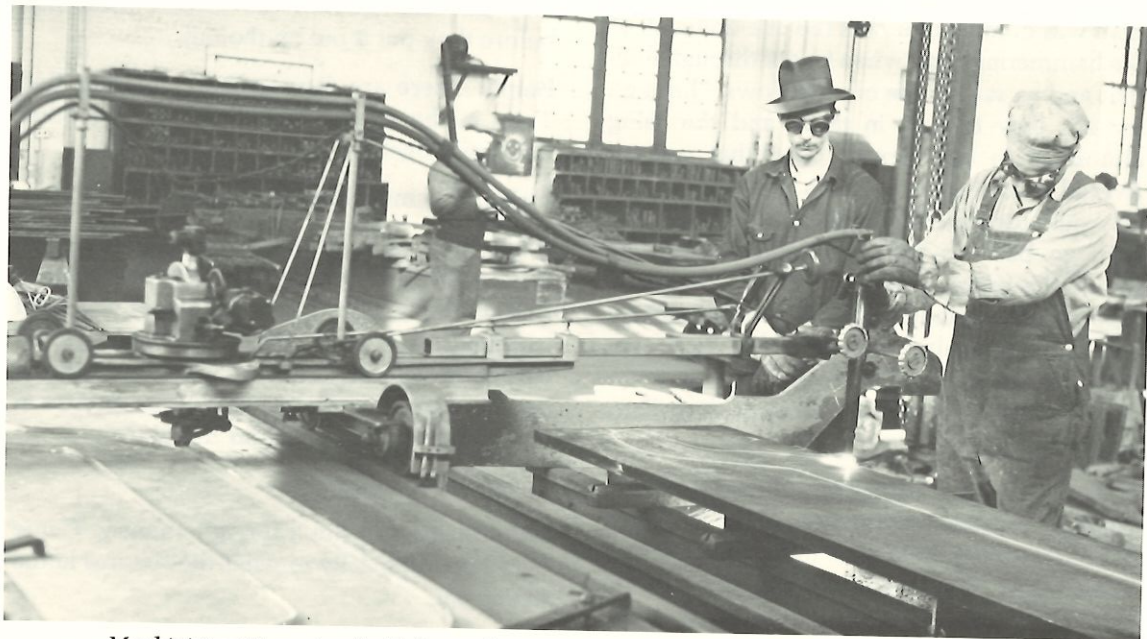
Ralph: Oh yes, some of the older fellows I see once in a while. The heck of it is you seem to only contact those people at funerals and things

like that. Me and my wife have worked with all of them. There were no electricians there, but there were people that were close to me like the Machine Shop foreman was there. He and I worked right together, you might say, on different projects. We saw a couple of carmen. My wife saw her old boss there. That is about the only time you see them. Once in a while I run into a couple of electricians.

Helen: I do a lot of volunteer work at Brokaw Hospital. And I read a lot. Play cards. I am retired. When you work thirty-nine years on a railroad you are ready to give up. When you retire, you retire. When you worked for a railroad you could never come home and read at night because your eyes were so tired that you would immediately fall asleep. Now I can lay here and read, evenings, days, and work when I want to and don't work when I don't want to. You live the life of Riley after you retire. It's the next best thing that the Lord invented, other than air-conditioning.

I bought my own air-conditioner. And I bought my own chair. You didn't have too many advantages on the railroad. Dirty, and hot and steamy and cold as the dickens in the wintertime.

*Interviewers: Terri Ryburn-Lamonte
and Burton Jones*



Machinist cutting a truck sideframe from a pattern, November 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

George Broughton

The son of a Chicago and Alton locomotive engineer, George Broughton was born in Bloomington in 1914 and began his machinist apprenticeship in 1937, just as the first diesel appeared. After some layoffs, Broughton served a special apprenticeship, and became the brake and stoker foreman during World War II.

Following the war, Broughton was transferred to St. Louis, becoming the road diesel supervisor, troubleshooting problems from Alabama to Chicago. In 1962 he returned to Bloomington to become supervisor of the Wheel and Axle Shop, retiring in May 1974.

Broughton's story touches the end of steam, and reflects an aggressive young man who was not afraid of changes in railroading.

Growing Up

That was back in the good old days. You walked, you didn't have cars. We lived on Roosevelt and Empire, by the Bent School, and we had one of the first telephones in the neighborhood. I can remember the neighbor came over and asked my mother, "Can I make a call on your telephone?" People just didn't have them.

We got the telephone around 1924. My father, being an engineer, got tired of missing calls to go to work. The call boy would say that he came over there and nobody answered the door, so he put in a telephone.

Sometimes he would be gone for a week at a time. Back in the late '20s. I seen the time when he got stuck down here on the coal train from Virden to Chicago, he might be gone about a month. If we wanted to see him we had to sit down at the Depot. He run the steam engines up and down for years and then finished his time up running diesels, pulling passenger trains from Chicago and back and forth.

West Chestnut Street had a whole row of stores on both sides of the railroad. Nobody had cars, you walked to the stores, so there was a grocery at least every three blocks, and

one store right next to the railroad and the subway was the grocery store—and the O'Neil's grocery store. West Chestnut Street on both sides of the railroad was a big community of stores, they had the library which sat on the south side of the tracks.

Before 1928 they used to have a big library on West Chestnut Street, this side of the railroad track and the lady's name that run it was Maggie Fenton, I well remember her. Dear old lady, she wore all her hair on top of her head like a beehive. She had glasses on her nose. Anyway, that was the Library, they had magazines, newspapers, books, anything you wanted to read down there. Anybody in the neighborhood could go in. The books the railroad bought, they put in a book plate with the front end of a steam locomotive on it. I got one someplace around here. Before that they had had a railroad operated dance band, a bunch of the fellows played in it. Some played the guitar, some played violin, horns. They used to have, before the Depression, small bowling leagues and baseball leagues, but that was all gone when I got there.



Boilermakers' Labor Day float, c. 1915. (McLean County Historical Society)

Labor Day Parades

They were all over when I started. There were plenty of them, they were beautiful, I have seen them, but I have never been in them. The Carmen's Union had a whole freight train made out of wood showing those things being pulled down the street. They had engines and a tender and a bunch of little cars. The Blacksmiths' Union mounted presses up on hay racks, pulled them with horses, and they would be up in there heating iron and bending iron for the blacksmiths. The Boilermakers would be pounding on pieces of metal that they did for the steam. Beautiful parades in those years.

I would say that they all ended around 1928 or 1929. Before the First World War and up to about '28 and '29, we didn't have them after that. The fellows from the Shops made all this stuff, and took it out and put it in the parade, and then when the parade was over it would be stored.

Starting Work

I worked on learning how to overhaul injectors, air compressors, and all the air brake equipment used on the locomotives, and being trained by the other mechanics. I served three years as special apprentice and spent most of my time in the air brake gang and took Wil-

liam Melvin's job when he passed away.

When I went down there it was the best paying of any place in the County, because you didn't have anything like State Farm Insurance. It was a good paying job, it was something, you went in there and you took a chunk of iron and you got to make something out of it. You made a part for an engine. Same way with a blacksmith. You went out in the Blacksmith Shop, you needed a part and you told the fellow what you wanted and you waved your hands around and give him an idea of what you wanted and he would take a chunk of iron and throw it in the furnace and heat it up and put it under a hammer and bend it around a while. He would bring it in to you. Then you get a blueprint out and you would read it. You would put that in the lathe and turn it in, wound up to what you wanted for a steam engine. It was interesting. The Depression was not over, that was right in the middle of the bottom of the Depression. The Depression did not get over until the spring of 1942 after we got in the war. Now Roosevelt didn't cure the Depression.

The Japanese cured the Depression, because they put all the industry to work. We got in the war on December 10, 1941, the next spring we hired everything we could lay our hands on.

The War Manpower Commission sends somebody down to you that was warm and barely able to breathe, and you had to hire him to go to work. If he couldn't do the work that was tough, you couldn't fire the guy because they wouldn't send any more. We did alright after we got in the war, we had full force. They hired everything you could lay your hands on. Counting the section men, the road men, the shop men and all, we had over 2,000 working out of Bloomington.

Right after we got in the War, before I got my good job, I had to dress up and put on a necktie. The boss called me in and said, "You are going to be the air brake foreman tomorrow and you are going to wear a clean shirt and a necktie and if I ever catch you without a necktie you are fired." That was the way you told the sheep from the goats. They had overtime and I got in on a bunch of that. We didn't have a forty-hour week. The Roundhouse jobs all were seven-day jobs. Those fellows had gotten used to it and after a while they all got older and they got sick and couldn't work. They would come in the shop and say, "they need guys out in the Roundhouse tonight and work the second shift." Or on a Sunday. When I went down these were six-day jobs in the shop, seven in the Roundhouse. I made a deal with them, I said, I would go out there but I want one straight shift where I'll work mine out in the Back Shop, and I'll go out there and work every night,—so I got thirty days of overtime. That is nice on payday, but it is hard on your back.

I only did it once and never again. I used to go out there every once and a while, but not to take a row of it. That made a nice big paycheck. There was all kinds of overtime. Down there during the war you couldn't hire people, and not only that, but if you did hire them, you always had to remember there was all kinds of paper work they had to make out and some of the fellows that they sent down weren't competent to do the job—so they just stayed with what they had and worked them overtime.

When I went down there I started out on my job, in serving my time, at 70¢ an hour. When I got the air brake-stoker foreman job it paid a glorious salary of \$200 a month. Then pretty soon it kept on going up and up and up!

Lunch Breaks

We worked 7 to 4 with an hour off at lunch and you carried your lunch down in a little brown bag. I quit carrying lunches. We had ice boxes at home but not at work to keep your lunch in. People would take down their metal buckets and you look in and sometimes they would take it over and dump it in the garbage because the heat had got it. The fellow sitting next to me one day opened his bologna sandwich and the maggots had gotten to it. From then all I ever took was an apple or a banana to work and a boiled egg. I just couldn't stand watching that lunch meat because you didn't know how old it was when it came out of the store. All they had was ice, no refrigeration. That was always 32 degrees and it was wet.

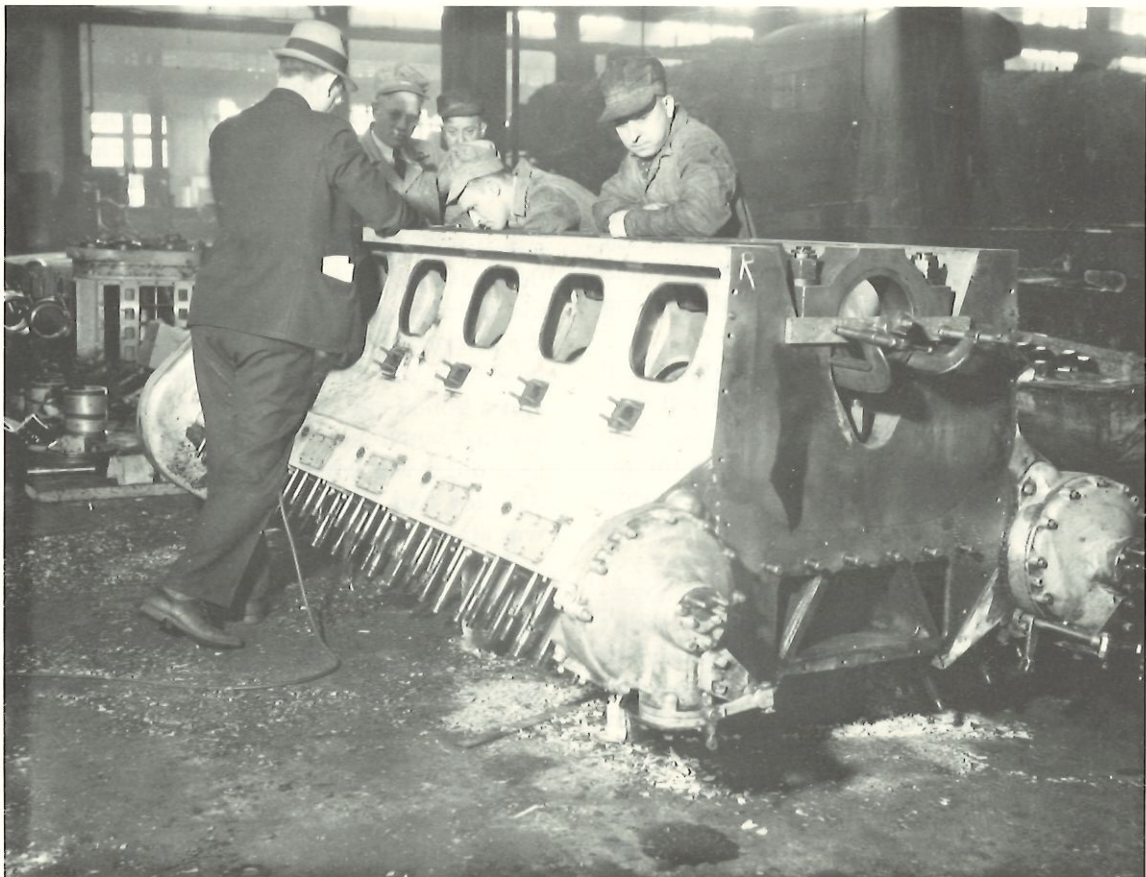
There were several restaurants. We had some of them that had regular seats, they would go over there at noon time. That was run by a Hungarian. When the whistle would go off at noon all the guys would run out the door and go in and sit down and she was setting it on the table before the whistle cooled off, because they had an hour. When they got done eating lunch they played cards. Actually, the percentage of people down there was small. The rest of us all sat down and had our lunch. Some carried it in a bag and some carried it in a sheet metal lunch box. Some of these had a can of soup in the top of their lunch box.

We had horse shoe things all around the place. We had 1 hour lunches. We changed it to a half-hour because some of them would lay down and go to sleep. They would drive stakes and pitch horse shoes at noon time, because you eat your lunch in 15 minutes, and that would give you 45 minutes to play.

Practical Jokes

Some of them were good: like putting a sheet of copper in a fellow's sandwich, and he'd bite into it and bite on it. Or making a center punch as he is gonna center punch the piece of steel but make it out of lead so when he comes around with a two-pound ball-peen hammer and hits it, the little lead piece would shrink in his fingers. Oh yes, the guys would get ready to go home at night and find their shoes nailed to the floor.

'Course, one of the classical little tricks was



1937 rebuilding of B&O 50's engine, C. W. Esch, G. L. Higgs and W. E. Diesel. (Pantagraph photo)

the fellow who hauled the steel chips out of the machinery, out of the lathes and all that, was to go over to his wheelbarrel and put grease under the handles so when he got a hold of it his hands would slip off. There was all kinds of things going on. And then there was some other things I won't mention because they wouldn't actually be that polite. I couldn't participate in them for the simple reason is that I couldn't have anyone pointing a finger at me. I could stand back and laugh. Very little of it was mean, I mean involved to the point where someone would get hurt. They would get somebody's hand hammer and take a hack saw and saw the handle about half off and smear a little grease and then when he would smash the handle it would break and there he would be without a hammer and all that kind of stuff.

Dieselization

We had the first engine, the B & O 50, come over here from the Baltimore and Ohio in 1937. It was built new in 1935, the B & O couldn't make it run—they shipped it over and

they charged our railroad \$50 a day for cost and the maintenance on it.

The boss said, "That thing is going to run or I'll fire everyone in the railroad." It run, we made it run. Sometimes it was questionable but it run. Nobody wanted to work on it. It was just an oversized automobile engine, and I mean really oversized, the engine inside of it. 12-cylinder, big V-type engine. It was something to work on, it was something different. You could handle a part in your two hands. It was nice to work on. Well, we had the first one in the shop down there, we had several guys in there that didn't want to work on them, the boss said, "That is your job or go home." A lot of them went home. We got that first one out of the shop, they brought it in here off the B & O. We had to overhaul both engines, had it in the shop and when they got ready to go out they couldn't find anybody to run it so the fellow that was a Back Shop general foreman said to me, "Do you know how to run it?" I said, "Well sure I do." I didn't know any more about it than he did, but I wasn't going to tell

him. I got up there and blew the whistle mightily, that alerted everybody in the place, and I sailed out the door with the darn thing waving my hands at all of them. That was a lot of fun, that was in 1938.

They took all of us out on the railroad and we went to the Electro-Motive Corporation at LaGrange, Illinois for a 30 day school on diesel mechanics, which was to keep the things running out on the railroad. These jobs took two hours to find and five minutes to fix. We went to school for a month apiece.

They were easy to work on, they give me a nice polished job, I could go out with finger-nail polish on, ride around the country and have a good time. In the Shops the side rods would weigh the minimum of 1,000 pounds, the big ones weighed a ton and the air compressor hung on the side weighed a ton, everything was heavy labor. After we got the diesels in there it was like working on an ice box, you took out an injector, put in a new one, you took a piston liner out and put in a new assembly, overhauled the others later on, on the floor. Much lighter work.

End of Steam

It was a lot of fun and they did make a lot of nice beautiful noises and they did smell nice. It was interesting work because we built the steam engine, the diesel parts are just like going to the dime store and buying pieces and putting them in. They are delivered to you in cardboard boxes. The steam engine, when you brought them in to overhaul them, if you needed parts the blacksmith made one part for you, then you put it in the Machine Shop, you put it in a lathe and you turned up what you wanted. You made the part, you actually fabricated it. Over the years, way back, they actually started from scratch building steam locomotives down here, new, and passenger cars and freight cars, new, that is why they had the size of the Shops—because they had Steel Car Shops, the Wood Car Shop, and the shop where they could build boilers for the steam locomotives. Take flat pieces of steel and bend them all up in circles, and riveted them together and put them all together, and they would build engines. We built a lot of them too. Originally, way back in the 1870s and '80s, they built a lot of them.

We had 360 steam engines pulling the freight on the railroad in the steam days. When we got

diesels, we had 50 diesels pulling three times as much freight as 360 steam engines did. They cut the force better than 50 percent because you got rid of all the people that were in the coaling towers, at Pontiac, Bloomington, Funk's Grove, at Lincoln, got rid of all the water stations which you had at every little creek you went by. You had to have men three shifts a day to pump the water up the tanks. They were gone. They got rid of half the section men because diesels didn't beat the track up because the wheels were balanced. They done it with less than half the men pulling three times the tonnage with one-half the locomotives.

Wheel and Axle Shop Foreman

The vacancy showed up down here in the shop of a nice job where I had Saturday and Sunday and all holidays off. Before I never had any of those days off because that is when all the high officials went home. A fellow retired who run the Wheel Shop so I got the job, which was nice inside work doing wheels.

We had 30 men working in there and we got the wheels in off the freight cars, passenger cars, and locomotives that were flat wheels or worn out wheels or sometimes we had cracked ones and we had to make new wheels, or new axles, or we turn them and restore them to service. When we got all the new diesels, the second batch, we had to make spares for all the new ones. We had to make 90 pairs of wheels mounted on axles and with roller bearings which weigh 3 tons apiece, then hang the traction motor which weighs another 3 tons, so the whole assembly weighs 6 tons. We made all the wheels. Each one of the steel wheels for the locomotives weighed 1,700 pounds plus a 1,000 pound axle. Freight car wheels weighed about 750 pounds apiece, with a 600 pound axle.

I had all these fellows working, we had one fellow on one big wheel lathe that we could put in a 6 ft. diameter wheel that restored all the tread. Another fellow operated a big boring mill that bored all the holes through the wheels so we could put axles in them. Three other fellows run a mounting press where we put the wheels on the axles, squeezed them on. Somebody else run the axle lathe that turned the journals on the axle and made the wheel fits. The diesel axle had to be grounded and

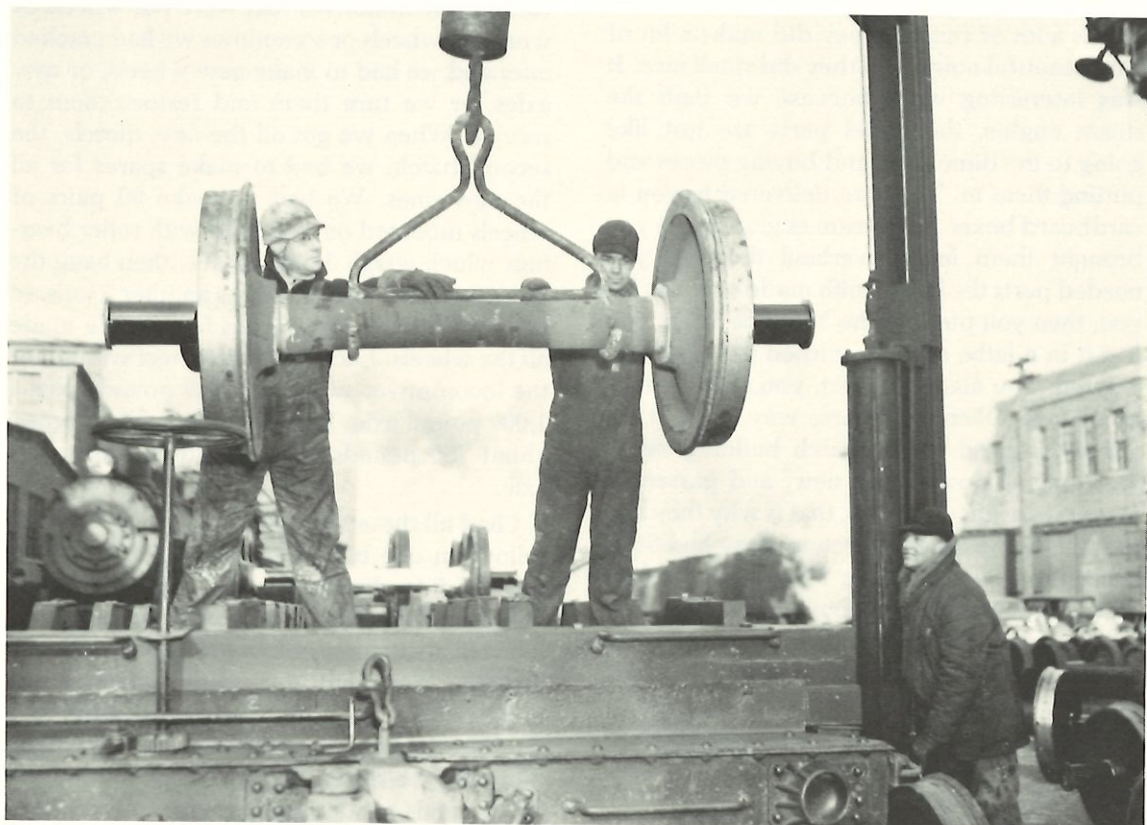
polished and turned absolutely slick to a number-one micro-finish. Also, I had the air brake gang that took care of all passenger car air brakes, freight car air brakes, and the locomotive air brakes.

I had one guy working for me down there, he was an Englishman too, his name was Jackson. He was absolutely one of the slickest machine men that they ever had in that shop down there. You would just go over and tell him what you wanted, and let him alone and boy, he would make it. He would make anything you wanted, he was real good and handy with a lathe. He could do anything. It was interesting. They say it is a challenge, no problem.

I enjoyed the Wheel Shop job because it was a challenge, we never had any problems, it was a beautiful challenge, we went in on Monday morning, you looked around and see this doggone gang of fellows out here and you thought, "My gosh, I am supposed to make wheels with that bunch?" So you got busy and made wheels. Well, you knew on Monday what you were going to do on Tuesday, you knew on Tuesday what you were going to do

the next Tuesday. With wheels. We averaged turning out, repaired or new, somewhere around 450 to 500 pairs of wheels a month. The boss would call you up right now and say, "Here is what I got to have, but I want it yesterday." You got busy and you did it. We brought in axle steel and we had apprentices in there where you were training, you had to teach them how to read blueprints so they could take a block of steel off the floor and put it in the lathe and turn the thing and make an axle of it. You had to take somebody else that never knew anything about it, even how to put a lightbulb in, and bring them in and make a machinist out of them to run a boring mill to bore the holes in the middle and bore the holes here and turn the tires around on them. I think it was a much better job than being out in the Roundhouse and working on diesels, because that was stinking, filthy, the parts were heavy and you would always be full of dirt and grease. I went to work, had a nice little clean office, sat there and watched them work all day long.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte



Loading wheels, January 1938. (Pantagraph photo)

Mrs. Lucille Lasky

Amongst the boilermakers and machinists, painters and carmen, there were also some very skilled professionals laboring in Bloomington's Shops.

Wayne Lasky was a chemist, hired by the railroad in 1945 to monitor the quality of oil used in the new diesels. His expertise included investigating wrecks and testifying for the company in court on materials and chemicals used in the railroad.

His wife, Lucille, shared this knowledge and interest in chemistry, and knew intimately her husband's work and job. Her story also includes some of their social life, and the enjoyment of travelling by train.

Family Store

We owned and operated a grocery store in Normal, besides him working at the laboratory. Lasky's Grocery Store. It was his father's, and when his father died, we took it over. I ran the grocery store and he worked at the railroad. It was at Main and Hovey, out there where McDonald's is. It was the McDowell property, and that is gone now, but there was a store and a house there, and the state took it a few years ago and made an extra wide street out of that corner.

Husband's Career

They called him engineer of tests, that meant he was head of the laboratory end of it. The diesels were coming into effect, and at the time he, during the war, he really worked at the DuPont's at Joliet from '43 to '45, and that's what his job was up there—testing oils and things like that. So really, when he went with the railroad, he went as an oil expert, because the oil in the diesels was very, very important to keep from scarring and corroding and things like that.

He didn't go with the railroad until '45. The thing, as I said, was that during the war they reclaimed oil, so when they changed the oil in the diesels, they had a reclamation plant at Jackson, Tennessee, and he used to have to go down and investigate. They took the oil out,

like you drain the oil out of your car, and they put it in carload lots and sent it to Jackson, Tennessee, where it was reclaimed until it was like new oil. And then put in additives that we need to keep from corroding and rusting and that sort of thing.

There were lots of changes. There were lots of layoffs after the diesels really came in effect. When he first went to work for the railroad, there were only two diesels. The rest of them were steam engines. As more diesels were bought, your roundhouses, I think is what they called them, they were closed down. That was the main part of the railroad that was closed down, what they called the roundhouse, that took care of the steam engines.

His job just became more important all the time. The more diesels were out there, the more oil changes. And they had a little invention that they would test the oil, say after from Chicago to Bloomington the oil would test. If the oil would show anything, then they'd drain and put in new oil. And then from here to St. Louis, then they'd test again.

They were not like union people. You might say they were on twenty-four hour call. If there was an accident here or an accident there and it had to be investigated as to what caused it. There were no definite hours, but the laboratory was open from 8 to 5.



Checking a wheelset before installation, November 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

Constantly, as a chemist, if you enjoy your work at all you enjoy it because you're always looking for what causes this trouble and what causes that trouble. Like an accident on the railroad, it could be caused by the steel being heated, a wheel coming off and they'd investigate to see what caused that wheel, and sometimes they'd go clear back to the company that they bought it from. And it was testing the oils and things to see if they had changed their procedure in refining the oil and just things like that all the time, and, of course at the time he went with them, they had began to put diesels on. His main work was keeping track of the oil and when it has to be changed and what the effect of the chrome in the oil and those things would do to the engines.

My education was practically the same as his in chemistry, and I could understand what he was talking about. And really I would say that I was his sounding board. You know, you can think things out loud, when you put it into words or you put them on paper it doesn't seem to say what you want to say. So I always said I was his sounding board. I understood

when he'd tell me that they found this in the oil and they found that, and that Shell had changed their method of refining, and all those kind of things that they said, I knew what he was talking about. Because of my association with chemistry also, which made it a very interesting job.

For instance they had one time in Tennessee, a fellow who was suing the railroad because he claimed that some carbon got out of the, he was a brakeman I think, and got out of the smokestack and caused him to have dermatitis . . . sores on his ear. Well, it finally went to court down in Tennessee, and it got proven—which to me was very funny—that it was not caused by the stack or the smoke or whatever they want to call it out of the diesel. His wife had been gettin' her hair dyed and he was allergic to her hair dye. To me those were funny things. He didn't win his case, you can see from that.

There were no cases up here, there was a few cases like one time, I think it was Meridian, Mississippi, a girl was suing the railroad. It never got to court because she claimed that

that tar stuff that they put on ties to keep them from eroding, that some of it got in her eye, and his job was to find out what was in there that would cause any permanent damage to her eye. Well, there was nothing in there. His job would be to find out where they bought that particular stuff and then go to the company and find out the contents and all of that. And it was proven that she had no case. It was just little cases like that.

He had to go to Mobile about once a month or something like that, but he travelled from Chicago to Mobile for any accident anywhere on that railroad. So they'd know who was to blame for the accident, on account of the insurance companies and things like that. He had to go to court and be the railroad's representative.

If there was a wreck down there around Heyworth or down at Springfield, before they'd move anything, he'd go to the wreck and find out what it looked like caused it and get pictures and things like that. Then if there was a tire on one of the wheels that broke off, get a piece of that tire and then they examine it to see what caused the tire to break, and cause the accidents. He always went himself, he never sent any of the other men from the laboratory.

I know at one time at 2 o'clock in the morning he had to get up and go to Lincoln. There on a siding, they had an accident coming off of the siding, what proved to be that the engineer came off the siding too fast.

Most of your accidents were hotboxes which caused fires and things like that. And they've had to set them out and they would tear that down and find out whether it was because there wasn't enough oil to keep those rags and things that were in the boxes. The accidents were more in the box cars and things like that than there were in the engines.

After all, your laboratory helps keep your overhead on the railroads down. For instance, what they washed windows with and kept the engineers' windows with. For instance Windex. Windex is colored blue. Well, it costs a heck of a lot of money to buy the amount the railroads had to buy, all due to the patent. So they took Windex and broke it down and found out what was in it and they said cobalt was what made it blue. So they put iron in theirs, a ferrous product, and made it green and that was the way

they got around the patent. Those were the things all the time they had to be doing to help keep overhead down.

He travelled on his own railroad. And whenever they'd be something, another railroad was trying something out, the different engineers of test would confide in each other and see what each one thought. Let's say if the Norfolk and Western put on a hotbox, the hotboxes would cause wrecks, then he'd go over to the Norfolk and Western, he'd go over to the C B & Q (Chicago, Burlington and Quincy) in Chicago and places like that just to confer and keep up on everything.

He had no immediate boss here. His boss was in Mobile. He had known the man who was his boss since he was a little boy before he ever went with the railroad. And, they had direct communication, they understood each other. They had a lot of confidence in each other. So he really had no problems with the railroad. If he said, "We can't use this oil any longer," they took it because he give his reasons why and they would cut off that supply company, and things like that. No, he was very, very well thought of, and very highly respected because he did not voice his reasons without having proved his reasons.

It was a challenge all the time. It was a constant challenge to know when to change oil, when not to change the oil. You see the diesels are very much like a car, and you have to keep your fingers on that oil all the time for your wear and tear on the parts of the engine. And, it was just something new coming up all the time. He was very, very fond of his job.

Social Life

Well, we went to the football games, baseball games. He bowled, I didn't, he golfed, I didn't . . . too much work, I thought it was a silly game. We were very strong Bear football fans. We had the same seats for about four years.

We drove up and drove back, on account of the location, of getting to the game. If it was bad weather, we did take the train. But if it was cold weather and bad weather to have the proper clothes, you went in your car.

My husband golfed out at Lakeside, and at the Municipal for years. He bowled at Pat Harkins's Bowling Alley, it was down on Front and I think it was Roosevelt, it was the old Coliseum down there, and then he bowled

over at the Circle when it was built, Circle Lanes.

You had your friends, and as I said, golf and bowling and plays at the University, our store was right out there on the University. And we used to play a lot of penny point cards.

I loved to travel by train, and there used to be conventions and things in San Francisco and where all the different railroad men got together and your AAR, which is the Association of American Railroads, and Los Angeles once, and Mobile and New York. I loved to travel by train and see the different parts of the country, like when you went on the Rock Island to California, why you went through the mountains with those cars and domes and those things that were very interesting, 'cause you really did see the country, which you do not see unless you take a lot of by-passes when you go by car. And you don't see anything when you go by plane, and it was very interesting to see the beautiful sights, especially through

the mountains on the railroad train. And then when we went by the Sante Fe, down through Arizona and New Mexico up to Bakersfield and up that way to California, it was very interesting all the way through.

We always travelled in a compartment, and the clientele, the people who waited on everything in the dining car, the food, everything was excellent.

The real convenience was that he used to do a lot of work between here and there in a compartment and, as I said, the dining, being able to look out the windows and see the sights. The courtesy of all the people that worked for the railroad was always excellent. The porters were excellent; you didn't have to go to bed at certain times, they were always ready to make your bed up when you were ready. The idea that you weren't worn out, either, by the time you got to the convention.

Interviewer: Michael S. Mulberry

William K. Dunbar

Born in 1925 along the Illinois Central tracks in Normal, William Dunbar fell in love with the steam locomotive at an early age.

After his World War II stint in the Army, Bill returned to Central Illinois and was hired as a telegrapher by the Alton, eventually advancing to train dispatcher, a job he held into the 1980s.

Although not directly a Shop worker, his interview has been included as another example of an often-forgotten occupation in railroading, and for his very honest feeling for the appeal of the rails. Currently he is very active in trying to preserve telegraphy, and frequently gives demonstrations of his craft, trying to keep this lost art alive.

Early Days

I was raised at 102 West Ash Street (Normal), which is now 102 West College, where the Bank of Illinois is and that was my exposure to railroads, because the Illinois Central was within 100 feet and I got "bit" at a very early age by the railroad bug. Steam bug didn't come all this honorable. Then after the war was over I did go to school for a while, I went to Illinois State for six weeks before I blew up and quit. Then I got the railroad job in 1946 as a telegraph operator.

I worked for a few months as a signal helper in 1943 for the Alton and then I was drafted and went to the Army. When I got out, then I went to work in 1946 as a telegraph operator, and was a train dispatcher in 1951, as extra train dispatcher, and I worked both phases of railroad until 1962; I got a regular job as a train dispatcher, let's see for 22 years now I've been a train dispatcher.

When I first started out on the extra board I would go here and there and yon, wherever they had someone on vacation or out sick and I did a number of different kinds of work that were included under the telegraphy on the railroad. First there would be power work, where you'd have lost your power and you'd have these levers for that particular place, that would be a railroad crossing or a set of cross-overs, usually the two were combined. You

were a telegrapher and a power Man and you had the phone orders. You also had the station and at the time none of these were day offices only. The agent was the telegrapher, the power man, they accounted for freight, the tickets, express, volume, and was also the agent for Western Union mail, who handled telegrams for the public, and I was a good many of these. And this was something very interesting, the man was indispensable. He was an integral part of the community. I went to San Jose (Illinois) to rebuild line several times and Doug had come there, I believe he told me in 1916, supposedly for two weeks, to relieve an agent for vacation or something. He never left. Then in 1946 I went there for the first time and that was 30 years later, Doug was still there. And he had been the mayor of the town, he was a director at the bank, and he was on the county board of supervisors, and this was repeated over and over again. They become a community fixture.

They were men of parts; they were telegraphers, accountants, they were agents interfacing between the company and the public, the railroad company, the express company and the telegraph company. And they would keep all those accounts to the penny, there wasn't any profit or loss then—it had to balance out every month to the penny. They became experts at it and this meant that they



C. Harold Adolph, second trick operator-leverman, holds up train orders for a northbound Illinois Central freight, Normal, Ill., depot, c. 1945. (Walt Peters photograph—Joe G. Collias collection)

were preparing documents for the freight. Every freight shipment, whether it was a single package or a car load, had to have a way bill.

Dieselization

Diesels, of course, could pull more and railroad people were slow to wake up to this. They were still thinking in terms of a locomotive being a frontal unit, so the diesel locomotive was just one unit. The diesel manufacturers were looking at multiple units, where you could lace two together, or three, or four, and operate it from a single control and not even have a fireman, just an engineer. Railroad people were slow, they were so traditional in thinking and so set in their ways many of the improvements had to be forced on them, like air brakes and automatic couplers, that just meant millions and millions of dollars to them eventually if they'd adopt these things. But we've never done it that way, so the diesel was a good example.

I'll give a local example of this. When we first got our first real freight engines they were numbered beginning with 800 and they were bought in two different sets, there was 800A and the 800B, because they didn't think that they would separate these engines and run them as single units, they didn't know what a flexible tool they had there, so they viewed these two units as a single engine. One was an A and the other was a B. Now this was a mistake, and this gave us a lot of trouble over the years because we had two engines out there with the same number and trains are identified by the engine number; that is, if one train has an order to meet another train the order will read "Train #51, Engine 103 meet Train #55, Engine 112 at Podunk." And this is the way one train identifies another. So there we had these diesel units and sometimes they would split them up then and you would have two engines out there with the same number, only the suffix letter was different, and a lot of people wouldn't want to put the suffix on there, they didn't understand that that had to be on there. And this is one of the ways in which diesels forced a different method of thinking on the railroads.

When they finally found out they could put four diesels together and haul three times the train than they had been before, they began

to do it because this meant less labor costs, less locomotive costs, less wear and tear on the track. They began to see the beauty of the thing, so we had to as dispatchers, we had to reaccustom ourselves to thinking in terms of 10,000-ton trains. We also had to find out where they were going to put these trains when we need them. The sidings wouldn't hold them. So this was a limiting factor for a time, you see, on long trains—the length of sidings, and all of the sudden over the country you saw railroads adding on to their passing sidings.

A lot of that has taken place and the reason they were able to do it is a signal system called Centralized Traffic Control. That is a code name that was developed by General A. A. Signal and that was really the proper name, Centralized Traffic Control. That meant that a man sitting in an office in one place could control switches and signals out in the field for a considerable territory. Now we have 200 miles of this, between Coal City and Wood River. And that enabled them to go to single track and the movements would be controlled. It's about like a model railroad. I think that's where they got the idea, but if a kid could sit and throw switches electrically on a model railroad, why can't we do it on a real one? See? So you have this switch and signal set up that permits you to run trains in both directions on the same track.

It is much safer 'cause it's set up on a fail-safe principle. Once we get the thing debugged and working the dispatcher establishes a route from A to B—the direction of traffic is automatically fixed in that direction, so that from A to B you get green signals. If you're trying to go the other way everything is red. And the signals at the entrance at each end of the single track segment, what we call home signals, you cannot go by those if they are red without the dispatcher's permission. The only ones to get by are with his permission. So a train will come up to the beginning of a single track and there is a red signal—he doesn't go anywhere. And the whole thing is on a fail-safe principle, if somebody opens a switch somewhere in that single track territory the signals will go red both directions of that switch, so you can't be on a siding and open a switch up again without the control station's permission. And he's not going to give you

that if he's got a train coming from either way. If a rail breaks that's part of the system. We get a track circuit indication that's the same as if we were a train operator, and signals on either side of that break would be red. So a train can go down there, find a red signal, and if it's an intermediate signal, he can go by it at restricted speed but no more, and looking out for something wrong. So the whole thing is set up on a fail-safe principle. It's a very fascinating thing.

Your particular job looks very difficult to somebody that is not trained in it. But we began to start on this about 1960, I think, on the GM&O, so the fellows who are working in this dispatchers office now grew up with it. We would go out when they changed from double to single tracks, we'd go out and see where the junction switches were or where the end of the double track was and the signals and what the siding distance was, if there was a curve involved and see how long the sidings were. They were anywhere from two to three miles long. And then we learned to operate the system one segment at a time; see, that's not difficult. What's difficult now is to bring somebody in and to train them on that system, because they have the whole thing in front of them. And things happen at a pretty furious rate. One drawback to this system is that not only would we have to handle trains, but have to protect people who work on the track. Motor cars, track machinery, section runs, maybe someone wants to move a house across the tracks, and we have to make sure that nothing gets into that particular segment while they are doing these things. It's a large responsibility and it's given me trouble. Because there is a certain procedure that you have to go through to establish, you put a block on the diagram, a couple of buttons, one you push and one you pull and it sets up a red light at each end of that particular section, and you can't put a signal in there. Well, I've had a lot of trouble forcing myself to put that block up before I tell the guy, "Okay, go ahead and start work," and if you don't do this you're going to go ahead and do something else and forget it and the first thing you know he's looking at a headlight and doesn't know what to do with it! So that part of it is a drag, it really is.

Another thing in connection with that, I

suppose, is that the traditional communication methods have been downgraded so that we don't do much telephone work anymore, we use radios, and everybody has a radio. The section foreman, the signalmen, the supervisors, the men on the trains, yard masters and everybody wants to talk to the dispatchers. There are days when I come home hoarse. I've got an amateur radio station, I enjoy it very much but I use telegraphy, I'm tired of talking. My wife sometimes says "You never talk", well she understands why, because I just get sick and tired of it.

I don't have a strong voice, it gives out on me after a little while. This particular radio system we use somehow or another got tied into the telephone, our dispatching telephone circuit, so we have to use the telephone to talk on the radio and this means that if you're in the middle of an order and somebody beeps you in, you have to stop what you're doing and see who it is and it might be somebody who says, "Anything for me? Anything wrong?" I didn't need that, and this goes on all day long. You feel harassed at times, very, very much so.

We have four regular men. telegraphers, and dispatcher and yard masters never work shifts, they always work tricks. That is another lost obscurity, you don't know how the term came about, but there is first trick, second trick, and third trick dispatcher, and there is a relief man who works two days on first, two days on second, and one on third, and that's his five days. And we bring in an extra man to work the odd day. So we just have four regular men working here now. When I began there were two chief dispatchers and there were two sets of train dispatchers, so we had two, eight, ten, there were ten men working here regularly in that office, now we have four. This is the minimum.

You can't go to asleep, you can't play a radio, you can't visit very often, there is just too much going on. I mean, the beauty of Centralized Traffic Control is that when a train is delayed on the line, then you can keep on advancing other trains with your signal system, because all they are doing is following the indications of signal out there, and as long as they have a clear, they are going to go. And that is the beauty of it. On the CTC you choose the one that you want to go on the

siding. For instance, it's frequently less costly from the standpoint of time consumed, to put a passenger train on the siding because he can duck in there right now. A long freight train heading in has to slow down and it may take five minutes to get in the cooler. Where you can keep him on the main line, put the passenger train on the siding, and neither one of them will stop. People say you shouldn't delay passenger trains, well you didn't unless you had to. It doesn't look that way, but that's what you've done. And that's one of the beauties of the CTC system, is its flexibility, but in order to take advantage of it, you've got to sit there and watch that diagram every minute. And I have brought my lunch box home unopened. I don't like that, I don't believe in that. That doesn't happen very often, but it can happen, and frequently I just gulp and swallow a little bit of lunch and then have to get right back to work. You don't get relief for lunch. We don't have a lunch break. And there are times I

spend seven-and-a-half hours out of eight in that chair, just like you were chained to it.

People have no conception of, there are people who ride the trains, you know, have no concept of this work—that somebody behind the scenes is supervising the movement of this train. They think the engineer has to get in the cab and they have to load the train and they can just go. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Railroad Crossing Names

There was a siding there (in Bloomington) along the Conrail tracks, it's Conrail now and when I began it was the Peoria & Eastern Railway which was leased by the Big Four System. The P&E had a track into the old gas works, it was called Union Gas & Electric Company, and of course they made their gas from coal.

The P&E had the track into that works and we would go and haul the materials on our



William Dunbar at the CTC panel, Bloomington. (William Dunbar collection)

line to be given to the P&E to be switched in there, and this was supposed to be an intracity move, but the P&E renamed that siding Costin in order to make it another town, so that instead of a switching charge they'd get a line haul from this freight. That's all I ever knew, that piece of track west of the C&A crossing was Costin. Now everybody else thinks it's Bloomington, but that's another place. It's another place.

And there are a number of these places, a railroad junction was always an important place, where two lines came together. For instance, between Gardner and Braidwood we had a junction, the track goes off to the left if you are going north to go to Coal City, and that's where the track of the Santa Fe begins, and this is right where the Mazon River goes under the tracks, and we call it Mazonia. And the public doesn't even know the place exists, but there used to be a tower there and this was an extremely important junction. For instance, a northward train that was going through Wilmington to Joliet over the single track line had to have another set of orders to go by Mazonia because he was going from a double track, even though he didn't meet any opposing trains, to a single track where some provision had to be made to meet him. So we had a column in there, we had routers for trains, and you had to operate the switches as well, crossover and junction switches. And the public never heard of Mazonia. Believe me, that is more important to us than, say, Pontiac.

Railroad Slang

The telegraphers themselves were called "lighting slingers" or "brass pounders" and that opens up another can of worms. That is the lingo and the slang that once existed around the railroad world. It was a complete mystery to laymen, 'cause I could talk with some of my co-workers about what we were doing and the guy off the street would not know what we were talking about. He would just be completely in the dark because of all the terms. It was mostly a slang thing. As I say, we were "brass pounders" and everybody had their own terms. A yard person was called a "mud hop" 'cause they had to go out and get around the trellis (yard) or they were called "lumber grabbers" because this is what they did, they grabbed the lumber off the

sides of cars and the machinists were called "nut spreaders" and the list goes on and on.

Telegraphy

To my knowledge there are at this time, and this is 1984, there are no working telegraph circuits on the railroads in the country that are used for moving message traffic. Now there may be a few, I think that the Illinois Central Gulf has one up at Dubuque, Iowa. There are probably little short circuits between here and there on isolated railroads, but no longer used, not that many people know how. One of the things I am interested in is preserving this thing and trying to get some way of setting up some circuits so that we can have a living museum-type thing and show people how this was done, and even if possible teach young people to do it, so it won't be a lost art. It was very much more like an art. You had to have a good ear, you have to have rhythm and I've worked with a lot of guys who didn't have it. And believe me, this can really tear your hair out. Some people just did not have the touch that they needed.

Romance of Railroading

At one time it was regarded as the cream of labor because they did pay well, and there was lots of work to be had and the pay scale was excellent and the work conditions were pretty good and there was an allure about it. This is pure and simply what brought me into it, because I grew up right beside the tracks. Those big engines would be rolling thru town trying to get the train up the hill, and the bulb would be going in a circle and the whistle piped down and the drivers rolling, and it was a sight and sound that you become addicted to. And there is something magnetic about the sight that they make. Many, many people have gotten smitten by this and as they used to say, "What makes boys leave the farm." This is precisely what happened. And of course that is gone now for the most part.

I wish there was something about Amtrak, they've got some multiple hollers on a lot of their engines that sound almost like steam whistles. The other day I was talking with somebody on the radio up at Odell about putting some machinery on the track after the passenger train went by, and while he was talking to me on the radio the train went by

and you could hear this wail, this minor key wail and it went from a higher to a lower pitch as it went by, you know, and it was just almost like having a steam engine out there again.

There is nothing like a steam locomotive. The old time engine men will tell you that it is an entirely different ball game, because of the way that you run it. You sort of felt with steam locomotives, you let it tell you what to do, if it was laboring then you'd change the reverse level little by little bit and got more steam into the cylinders, and that kind of thing. And, of course, there was rhythmic sounds about them, there was the clapping of the rods, and the exhaust, and the boiler toiling and a different kind of machine all together.

It is an occupation that, I've said before, that's very attractive, there is an allure to it, you could even say a romance to it. I don't like to use that word, but I guess that is so. I think that a railroad, as in any kind of trans-

portation work, because truck drivers are hooked on it, riverboat people are hooked on it and you can go in any transportation industry and find this. I suppose it has to do with faraway places. I can remember years ago when you watched a freight train go by and there would be a name like New York Central, Southern, Great Northern, International Great Northern, Texas & Pacific, and if you had itchy feet it's all you could do to just stay there, because there were these faraway places that would be calling to you. Many people, especially before automobiles were a means of quick and easy transportation, many people spent their lives in one community, and they would see all these other places and want to go there, it called to them. It really did.

And as I say, the steam locomotive was a very compelling machine and very few people have one go by without at least turning their head to watch it, and most people would stop and watch it go by, because of the noise



Train time, C&A depot, Atlanta, Ill., c. 1900. (William Dunbar collection)

of the wheels and rods, the whistle, and the sound of the exhaust. So that there was an allure about it.

It was good work, it paid well, for instance, in the operators' office we did not have a scale, an ascending scale of wages. What I'd be doing if I went to relieve that agent up there, I got the regular pay that he got, he'd been there 50 years, and I was just a few months old in the railroad, and I got the same pay scale that he did. So it was attractive from that standpoint. And another thing is the jobs that women could do on the railroad, and there were many women telegraphers and clerks and this sort of thing, they got the same wage as a man did. We've been away ahead of society in this respect. So that was something that attracted people.

It was an essential industry given the economy that we had, and the idea of separating the source of supply from the manufacturer, so that you took iron ore out of Minnesota and shipped it to Gary or Pittsburgh by rail, coal was the same way and the country was tied together with rails, so it was essential industry and, I suppose, we took some pride

in that we did some worthwhile kind of work.

There was a pride in your expertise and the team work, and I think that this has got a lot to do with it, it was a dangerous job, it still is a dangerous job, you can get killed in a blink of an eye out there if you don't know your Ps and Qs, and everybody looks out for everybody else. So you have our friendship based not on whether you root for the same baseball team or work the same way, but on the fact that you literally keep each other from being killed. And there was a camaraderie there that you don't get working a lathe or something like that. So yes, it is different, but it has been different ever since it started. I know that there are parallels in other industries but this is the one that I know about. And I know it is probably more true in the past than it is now, but it is still true today that when two railroaders meet they talk about railroads. That is their life, it is a way of life, it is not just a way to make a living, but it's a way of life.

Interviewer: Terri Ryburn-LaMonte

Nicholas J. Petri, Sr.

Nick Petri's family was one of the original Hungarian-German families in town, his father was instrumental in founding the Hungarian Club and his uncle Joe Fellenz Sr. is also included in these interviews.

Born in 1912, Nick grew up in the shadow of the Shops, and remembers vividly the shopworkers' strike of 1922. He began work in 1929, and his quick mind and adept ability at math helped insure employment in the Stores Department, which procured raw materials for the Shops and the whole railroad.

Union activity shaped much of Nick's busy life, which usually included two and sometimes three jobs at a time. For many years he served as division chairman for the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, and won a reputation for honesty and integrity. He left Bloomington in 1968 to work for the Bartenders International Union, but returned to town after completing that job, where he remains active in the Hungarian Club and union activities.

Childhood

We lived right alongside the railroad—901 Poplar Street, just right on the corner of Walnut Street and Poplar, right at the railroad. That was right along the old center fill, which was right down there—oh, about 300 feet from where we lived was the old center fill, where all these steam locomotives would go in there and they would knock all the fires out of them before they put them inside the shop and repair them. And the same way when they got ready to take the same engines out on their runs, then they would start the fires in the Back Shop—in the Roundhouse; they would start the fires and bring them out and they would fill them up with coal and water. They had the big old coal elevator there where the coal would duck down through chutes and was brought up through the top and put in hoppers up in the coal. And they would unload the coal into their tender of the steam locomotives and also have to water them. The water tank was part of it and then the tender was the other part that held the coal. So that was how you would operate and we lived right there. Right

on that corner, so that's all I knew. In fact I used to—all summer long and all winter long—take a little sack and walk along the tracks where the coal spilled out and carry it home—that's how you got your coal. Then they would take the old ties out from underneath the rails and throw them on the side and you would go over and drag the ties wherever they would take them out—had a little two wheel wagon, and go and put the ties on and bring them home and would saw those ties up for your fire. For your stove and that in the wintertime. As long as old Mike Christie didn't come along and catch you picking up the coal off the tracks—why, well he would run you off. He was a detective. He was the watchman.

St. Mary's. That was a German/Catholic church. We only lived two blocks from the Irish church which was St. Patrick's. But we couldn't go there because we were German/Catholic so we had to go to the German school, and we had to walk across town to go over to St. Mary's school. That's the way things were done. The German-Hungarians they did not go to the Irish church and the Irish didn't



C&A Shops, c. 1948. (Charles Mehl collection)

go to the German church. Any rivalries were way on the West Side in one section of town. Anything west of the railroad track and Market Street north, was the West Side and that was the old—as we say—the old Forty Acres, and then from Market Street south on west of the railroad tracks were Beich's and the candy company and all that, was the old Swedes—the old Swedes—were all out in that area which was that area there. And then anything the other side of the railroad tracks, well, that was a little bit higher class than the rest of us, so that's where your differences were. You lived on the wrong side of the tracks if you lived on the west side of the railroad tracks. That's the way things were for years.

South Hill, you couldn't go across there. Especially—you could never date a girl out of your area. No way. Back in them days. Anybody that would come from the other parts of town over in our area—as soon as they would cross the West Side tracks—they were always dumped into the horse water trough. The

Catholic kids would gather them up and dump them into the water trough and send them back across the tracks. Oh yes, it was that way. It's unbelievable, but then that's the way it was.

Parent's Immigration

In 1907. Into Granite City and he worked there at the starch factory. At the Staley starch factory. Shoveled that starch. That was just—a shovelful of that weighed a ton. I could never understand how he could do that. He used to tell—I can remember him saying that they had four or five other men working there, shoveling starch at the time when he was, and they were all big Russians, he said. They were huge men. But he was a small—he wasn't as large as I am. But he could shovel starch with them. Amazed me when he would tell us about it.

He started as a laborer there at the Scrap Dock, he knew metal. I don't know where he learned it because he couldn't write very well. He was able to sign his name but that was it.

But he knew metals. It amazed me that he could tell one piece of metal from another. That's how he finally got to be foreman, because he knew the metal better than anybody else in there. That's where he was, foreman out at the Scrap Dock there, sorting all these different types of metals. To me they all looked alike until he explained what the difference was and that was his—he was great at that. I could never figure out where he learned it.

In fact they used to teach German over at St. Mary's. When World War I started in 1917 and 1918 they made them quit. So they didn't teach German any more after that. But over at St. Mary's, every Sunday at 8:30 Mass, that was always the German preaching, where the priest would preach in German at that Mass. So that's where we got what German I did, but then my folks didn't insist on us talking that and I kinda regret that I didn't learn more of it 'cuz I have forgotten so much of it. I know a few words. I can answer them in English when they talk to me in German. I can answer them in German, but to be able to put the right words out, I have to stop and think and think before I get the right word out.

I can remember my folks had a picture of old Franz Joseph. They got rid of it during the war there, and I think along about that time Prohibition come in. I can remember my Dad making some—which now I would call apricot brandy—making it on the old stove, the old kitchen stove there, used to heat your water on the back of it, and you have to cut your kindling for the stove and so forth. That was your job every night, to cut the kindling and have it ready to start a fire at 5:00 in the morning, in the old little stove and have that—but I can remember Dad having the old little copper tubes and stuff and my mother, oh, she got mad at him. She didn't like it around there. But it would help keep us living during the time, I guess.

My stepbrother, Joe, he went to work as a laborer over there. Then he quit that and he went in as a brakeman, worked as a brakeman for a few years, I don't know how many he worked on that, and then he finally—but he did learn the electrician trade and so he ended up as an electrician. He went from a full brakeman into an electrician.

1922 Strike

Yes. 1922. I remember it very much. They had the National Guard there and they had a little camp just right where we lived. See our house set down about—I say about ten feet down the road—make a turn and went right alongside the railroad there, which was Poplar Street, and Lumber Street would run into Walnut Street and that was all alongside the railroad there and they had the National Guard—they had one little camp sitting right there where we were, right up behind the house there on the railroad—on the railroad property, and if I recall—I think there was eight young fellows there—I would say they were about 19, 20, or 21 years old. They had them guns, and boy, I tell you, they had shells that were about 3 inch-long shells. I remember they left a few shell holes up at the dairy, which was up on Lumber Street there about a—oh, about a block and a half away from where they were. They would take a few pot shots around and put some holes up in the brick at the dairy which was sitting right there. Just right off the corner, just around the bend on Lumber Street. Oh, they had a few squabbles there—I think a few of the men gathered over on the other side of the railroad track, which was on the other side of Chestnut Street prior—before they had the subway in there.

The only part I ever know is where they had that big battle out there, oh, on Chestnut Street, they were throwing bricks and everything else at the National Guard there. They were threatened there for shooting them a few times but then they didn't—there were a few shots fired—there were some shots fired but I don't remember anybody getting killed there. From there on I think they had some meetings up at the Courthouse after that.

I was ten years old, and we didn't—you got along with what you could. There was nothing that you could do. Because you just had to live on what you could and you had to depend on the grocery stores up there, Ramage Grocery and Fisher Meat Market, they would give you credit, 'cuz I know—I think it took my folks almost two or three years to pay back what they owed on the grocery bill. But they were good enough to carry you, they knew that if you did go back to work you would pay it and they were very good about extending the



Scrap and lumber yard gangs, Stores Department, March 1930. (McLean County Historical Society)

credit, that's what you lived on. They didn't save any money that's for sure, 'cuz they had no money to save—there were three of us children.

Strikebreakers

They lived right in the Shops. They wouldn't let them out. They had to stay in there, they couldn't come out. They couldn't come out for anything. They couldn't even come out to eat or anything—they brought all the food in to them and everything. Well, if they came out they would have got stoned and beat up and everything else and run out. They would've been run out of town. But they stayed right in the Shops, they lived in boxcars. The railroad brought all their food in to them and everything.

Starting Work

I went over and applied for it. It was in 1929. I had worked prior to that as a delivery boy for Fisher's, which was a meat market. I used to ride the horse and wagon and deliver meat. Used to deliver it seven days a week but then in 1929, and they didn't pay that much, you got \$7.50 a week you were doing good, that was in 1927 to '29. I graduated in 1927 from grade

school, I never did get to high school, you had to go to work. So in 1929 I went over to the railroad and applied for the job in the Storage Department and my Dad, he was foreman out at the Scrap Dock at the time, but I got started out there working under him and that's in 1929 and in 1931 I got laid off.

I started back in September of 1933 and I never lost a day after that. I worked from 1933 to '37, in August I worked as a Scrap Dock laborer and a laborer over in the Lumber Yard, and then in 1937 I transferred to Kansas City and went to work there in the Storage Department from 1937 to '45. I ended up as an assistant storekeeper at Kansas City. In '45 I transferred back to Bloomington and got on as a storehelper and as a clerk and ended up as chief clerk.

Prior to the Union, when I worked in '29 to '31 and got laid off I noted that whenever they laid somebody off it made no difference how many years you had been there or anything. I had just started and I only had been there about two months and here I know one of the fellows got laid off and he had been there about six or seven years and they kept me working and laid him off. They did call him back about two months later but that's one of

the things I noticed, it made no difference how long you had been there, how much seniority you had, it didn't seem to mean anything. The boss liked you and you were a good worker, well then you stayed. If he didn't like you, fine, he could lay you off anytime and that would be it, you were done. He would just lay you off and say "Well—you don't have to come back next week." They would tell you that just about the time, 4:00, the time when it was to go home. You worked from 7 to 12 and 1 to 4 and they would come up at five minutes to 4 and say, "We don't need you next week," then, "Well, when do I come back, "Well, we will let you know." Maybe they would, and maybe they didn't. If they didn't like you, well you were gone, and that was the main thing that I noticed there.

They won't give you anything unless you go—as an individual—you wouldn't have any chance at all to tell them you would like to have a raise because they would tell you "well, we don't need you" and that's it, you're gone. You couldn't walk in and ask for a raise. In fact I did, I—right off the bat there, I worked for a short time over in the Scrap Dock and then the next thing I know they had me over in the Lumber Yard and I would help the foreman in the Lumber Yard because I was good at figures, has always been my repertoire, figures, and I could figure board feet just as fast as he could—or if he couldn't figure that fast then—he would ask for me to come help and work in the Lumber Yard. I would unload the stuff and then he was always calling me into his office there to help him do his figuring on all this lumber.

Then I finally got in the Storeroom there and worked in the office. The same with Mr. Foley, he was the storekeeper, everytime he would come up with a report, "Why Nick, come into the office here." O.K. "Can you figure this report out?" Yep. "O.K., you take care of it from now on." I ended up with all the reports because I could make them out and could do all the figuring for him.

Everytime they had something—I was very fortunate in that way 'cuz that's the reason I got all these jobs that I did get into—because I could do that work and was good at it, which was not to be bragging about it, but then figures have been my job all my life. And as I say, I never had a high school education, but that

was the point, and that was the main reason for me. If you're by yourself it makes no difference and you're just a number to the company, it's only through unionization that you will get in any better benefits, that's the reason you got your vacations, and you get sick leave, which come in after years of union because you didn't have it before. There was no such thing. You worked—if they wanted you to work seven days a week, you worked. And if you told them you didn't want to work they would let you go. There was no such thing as a—well you would work eight hours and go home—then if they wanted you to stay you had to stay whether you liked it or not. Regardless of what you had to do that was the whole situation and that's the way you worked—with those conditions.

Each job I did by working my way up, by learning each job that I got into. Laborer—you did all of the manual work of sorting scrap, stacking lumber, loading lumber to be shipped out to various terminals. Unloading lumber, sorting it, delivering it to the railroad shops, into the mills.

The scrap was always sorted and sold to various scrap dealers all around the country. That's where they were loaded with the cranes and stuff, but you had to sort all the different sorts of scrap. There was, I would say, about thirty-five to forty different types of scrap that you had to sort into—they had various bins and boxes where you throw the scrap, they were always unloaded in a pile. You would have to sort through by hand and you would have various bins and then the crane operator, when you had—it would almost be a car load, he would come up with the magnet and pick this up out of each separate bin and load them in separate cars and then ship them out for sale. I worked in the Oil House there and I bought all the oil, gas, paints and so forth, all building materials for the railroad. Everything from this terminal would be sent over the system, which would be from Chicago to St. Louis to Kansas City, that was the old Chicago & Alton railroad. In 1946 the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio took over the railroad and they had the railroad up through '68 when I was working there. When the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio took it over then the terminal extended all the way to Mobile, all the way south to Mobile.

In each section you worked in—I worked in

every section in the Storehouse—we had seven sections with each department buying a certain type of material. One would buy castings which would be used on the old steam locomotives and another department would buy bolts, nuts and washers. Each one was separated in that many departments and I worked in each one of them. First, was the Storehouse, and I ended as a clerk. When you got to be the clerk you was the one that ordered all the material for the various terminals like Chicago, Joliet, Kansas City, Roodhouse, Springfield, Alton, St. Louis—everyone would send their requisitions for material to us. We would ship it out to them. In boxcars. Helpers would take their orders and fill them, and then they would ship them out and we in turn would consolidate all of our shipping orders and we would purchase material based on our needs.

Then in 1946 when the diesels come in and the steam engines went out, well, then all the castings which you had to buy for the steam locomotives, we couldn't buy any more because diesels were mostly electric and that changed the whole operation of the railroad. Where you always bought a lot of coal and then you went to oil, fuel oil on your diesels. I used to have to buy all the fuel oil and everything for the diesels. Up through '68, that's what I did. For the last two years I was chief clerk, to the storekeeper there. He was the number-one man, I was the number-two man in this department.

The biggest change was when we went into dieselization. But the jobs didn't change. If you started as laborer—if a vacancy would occur—store helper would be the next one up. They would post that on the bulletin board, then the man with the most seniority—if he figures he was qualified for that job, he would apply for it. Then after five days then the job would be assigned to whoever was the best qualified and the senior person. That's how you got to be a store helper. Then from store helper you would go into a clerical position or assistant clerk—assistant then chief clerk. Regular clerks would purchase materials. And each one had their separate department. That was the procedure you would have to go through. And it was based on seniority and qualification.

Each one was a new learning—'cuz I worked in every department in the Storeroom. I think that I was the only one in that department that

had worked in every department there was. But I made it a point to do that, 'cuz it was to my advantage to do it this way. I got a broader knowledge of everything—of the total operation of the Stores Department. Also temporarily I went and got bumped one time and I in turn displaced a man over at the Freight House. I went over to the Freight House and worked over there three months and another vacancy opened and I rebid for my job back over in the Storage Department. I worked in the Freight House for three months, I worked two weeks as a crew dispatcher, so I worked around the various departments outside the Storage Department.

Social Life

I had a lot of life-long friendships from the people that I worked with. It was kind of a close knit—after you were once in and established and worked steady, why then you established that with the people you worked with. I remember working for old Mike O'Neil at the old dance hall on the West Side, he started with a dairy, and then he built the old dance hall over on West Chestnut Street. I worked with him for about two years. He used to buy all the castings for the railroad and that man, he knew everything that—every casting—he could give you the number of it, the name of what it was and everything. He had a fantastic memory. All he had to do was look every time at the Machine Shop—what order of casting.

Then Vern Foley, he was the assistant storekeeper and he ended up being the storekeeper. A short guy who loved to sing and every time after work, if you got any place with him in a tavern you had to stop and sing. He was—I remember he was the guy that hired me, he was the assistant storekeeper in charge of hiring and so forth and he was the man that hired me in 1929. Then of course I remember George Knuth, he was the chief clerk, I think he was—the chief clerk for years and years. And I only had one other chief clerk ahead of him in all them thirty-eight years. Well, George was a little bit hen-pecked. He married a gal there, oh—Clara—they had the big dairy on the West Side, that was one of the biggest dairies at the time, that's going back I would say right now about fifty years.

They used to have a few picnics, a few railroad picnics, that's going back quite a few

years. They had a couple of them out at O'Neil Park and I think about four or five were out at Miller Park. They had a few picnics, but the separate departments had them, like we were in the Stores Department, they would have it, the Machine Shop would have theirs separate, the Boiler Shop would have theirs.

In 1919, my father and my uncle, Joe Feltenz, and twelve other German/Hungarians, they started the American-Hungarian Family Society. It was just a club out on North Calhoun Street. The old Hungarian Club as they call it, it's still there and we're the second generation, our children are the third generation. That was our own private club. No outsiders could belong to it, you either have to marry into it or be born into it to be a member of this club and it's going along great right now, all our families are still in it. That was our only socializing—some of them were Lutherans, some of them were Catholics, others were no religion at all but we always played volleyball against each other.

I even played volleyball on one of the Lutheran teams for a while, I played volleyball with the St. Mary's Church team over there and we played baseball. We had our own baseball teams over on the back diamonds of the railroad. We all played baseball back there. Baseball and volleyball was the two main things we had. We had four or five shop teams in the summertime and then we had about six or seven or eight volleyball teams in the wintertime. We started that at the old Western Avenue Community Center. That was built by old Reverend Green and the railroad put up the money and built it for him.

Depression

In 1935, we got a ten percent cut, we went from 38¢ an hour to 34.2¢, I think it was. Then we were promised that when things got better the B & O would pay us back. They would give us that money with interest. We never did get it. The B & O shut us off and dumped us out and that was it. We got nothing back. They got rid of us in 1938 and that was it. We lost our 10%. Then for history's sake, from 1929 to 1937 the railroads were the highest paid industry, the highest paid industry in the United States.

But after 1937, when they got the right to organize, they started the CIO and United Auto Workers, they started with sit-in strikes up in Detroit. As of that time, we didn't get a

raise from all this time, from 1928 when we were getting 38¢ an hour, until 1941 was the first raise we had. We never got a raise. At that time the judge in Durham, North Carolina, I never will forget, he said that we were entitled to 25¢ an hour but he could only give us 5¢. That's all we got was a 5¢ an hour increase at that time, in 1941. But that was the first raise in all them years. So, from that time on the railroad industry really hit the skids in wages because they couldn't keep anybody. It seems they learn a trade and then they would go work somewhere else. Especially the machinists. They would immediately go where they could get more money.

World War II

I was in Kansas City at the time. I worked seven days a week all the time then. There was just the three of us, that was the end of the line and I ended up as assistant storekeeper. They had a storekeeper and I was the assistant, and we had a helper with us. What we used to call a storehelper at that time so he could do any of the work under us. The three of us would order all the material for the Diesel Shop and the Car Department and the section outfits. That was the time when you were automatically given an exemption card. I think I was listed as DI—it was during World War II and that meant that you were too valuable to the railroad, they wouldn't release you. I did sign up but then the railroad never did release it. I had a younger brother who didn't get in on it. My brother John. But he never worked on the railroad but he got into the service. My brother-in-law was in, but working on the railroad, I never did get the chance to go. They never would release you 'cuz I was the assistant storekeeper and they said no way, so you didn't go—so you automatically got your card. Every six months you would get your card that you were exempted again for six months. The railroad put it in there automatically for you.

In fact, I worked seven days a week at the railroad, worked five nights a week at the Railways Ice Company in the summertime. Icing these fifty car refrigerators, trains coming out of California and then on top of that, I was an usher. I used to usher at all the burlesque shows, all the baseball games, all the variety shows that would come in or all the big bands and so forth. So I had three jobs out there. Wherever I went I guess I had three jobs.

Union Activity

I belonged to the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. See, their unions were broke up in 1922, the unions didn't start getting back in there until about '36 or '37. I was out in Kansas City at the time and I joined the Union out there—like the latter part of '37 after I got out there, I was in Local 209 in Kansas City. Then we got back and I transferred from the Kansas City to the Bloomington local. I was very active in Union business. I was the secretary of Local 209 before I left in '45 and then I ended up as the local chairman here for the local—I went in 1952 as local chairman for the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. I have also worked nights tending bar for 25 years and I joined the Bartenders' Union in 1948. So I belonged to two unions and I worked two jobs all the time.

Well, I worked the railroad, I worked tending bar and then I was business agent for the Railway Clerks and my territory was Chicago,

Joliet, Bloomington and Roodhouse and down to Springfield, but then I got in as division chairman, which was that same year, then I covered everything. We had three sections up here which would be Joliet, our Chicago area had one local chairman, Bloomington had a local chairman, they had a local chairman down in St. Louis. I was elected division chairman on the very first year when I got in, in 1952, and represented the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks until after I quit. But I am still with the Bartenders' Union. And when I quit in '68 I took a job with the International Union for the Bartenders, Hotel and Restaurant Employees there in the International Union. I was the administrative assistant to the general secretary and treasurer there, that was a number-two job and I was his assistant.

I can remember when I first went in there I was very green as a representative for the Union and immediately—you have a griev-



Brotherhood of Railway Clerks convention, GM&O delegates, Nick Petri, third from left front row, c. 1955.
(Nick Petri, Sr.)

ance—you go in and talk to the superintendent. Then you would walk in there, green like I was and you go to talk about a grievance. Well like I said, I had a rude awakening during the negotiations. I would bring up this grievance there and the superintendent would tell me, "Well, we have a special agreement." I was flabbergasted. I said, "What do you mean a special agreement? I go by the rule book. That's all I have, I'm going by what the rule book says." But the superintendent says, "I got a special agreement." "I want to know about the special agreement." "Well, the man that had the job before you as division chairman—well, we had an agreement with him that this is the way we would do this. That's the way we do it." Fine. Well that happened about four times in a row. Everytime I would go in there, he said, "Well, we got a special agreement."

I got sick and tired of it so I called Cincinnati and called George M. Harrison, he was the general president for the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. I called his office there and they gave me the man that handles the grievances, I say, "What's going on here?" He says, "Are you a party to it?" I says no, I don't even know anything about it. He says, "Well, as of this date you write him a letter and tell him that there are no more special agreements. If it isn't in the rule book, tough. Here is your rule book. You as management, you have your interpretation of it, I, as representative of the Union, I have my interpretation of it. However, we agree to work reasonably within them as to what we can agree between us.

It got to the point there, I would always advise a superintendent or the storekeeper that I had a grievance, this is it, if it isn't corrected I will have to file it. Well, the first few times they didn't pay any attention to it. But I filed them and I collected. Well after that when I would notify them, somehow their chief clerk forgot to notify the superintendent that I had notified them. I would walk into the superintendent's office, he says, "Hot damn, Nick, what is it now?" "Well, I notified your office of the situation." Then he would call the chief clerk in, then he would get told up and down. "Why didn't you tell me," he says, "when you know Nick comes up with something, he's got it." I don't go in there unless I have a claim. In fact, if you file a grievance with me, I will go

over it with you. If I don't think you got a claim, I'll tell you. And if you still don't think I'm right, I will sit down with you and I'll write this claim up to the general chairman of the railroad. And send it to him. Then he would come back with his decision. And I would say, a hundred times out of a hundred, he would always say that's the way it is. What Nick tells you is it. 'Cuz I lived with the rule. I wouldn't break my rules one way or the other. You can't do it. Once you start then you're in trouble.

I used to always manage to take one or two of the other people in the Union, have them sit in with me on grievances so they would have an idea of what goes on in those grievances, when you go in to meet with management. They said they wouldn't have that job for anything. You didn't get paid for it. All I would get would be—I got an expense allowance which would be only if I left town. I never got a penny for anything that took place in town. If I had to go to Chicago for a grievance, then I could get \$25.00 a day for my expense allowance, and you would go into these towns and these other people would expect you to take them out for dinner and buy them a few drinks and this and that. That was more than I was making. So—but you had to do it.

You had to be so careful on how you wrote it up and how it was handled. But it was interesting. Very, very interesting. It was your word against theirs. As long as you lived by the rule book, you couldn't go wrong.

Leaving the Railroad

Well, one thing about it, after you once get to working there, then somehow it kinda gets into your blood and then it's different, it just grows on you. Whatever is it about it—it's a fantasy. Because—what about it? It's the idea that you're part of an industry that is going to all parts of the United States. You're part of it and you know that things that you handle, here today, New York tomorrow, maybe down into Florida, it's quite something. That's all I can say about it—just the idea of being, you will always be called a railroad man and what there is about it, I don't know but it sure makes you feel like you just gotta stay with it. And they do. Most everybody that starts just stays right with it. Very seldom do they leave. They got in—like I say it gets in your blood and then that's the way it is. It got out of my blood in '68

though, because I left there to take a job with a lot more money. That's when I worked with the Union.

They (Bartender's International Union) offered me double what I was making at the railroad, why, I took the job. They did call me back the following week after I told them I was quitting—because at that time I was chief clerk and the storekeeper—every place he moved on the railroad I moved up behind him—they asked me to come back up here and meet with them, the general storekeeper come up from Mobile, we met up here in 1968, that was a week after I went down to Cincinnati and they asked me to come back, they wanted me to be the storekeeper. They said they had been grooming me all these years for that job. I says, "Well, that's fine" but then I asked them if Mr. Daley was going to retire. He was 71. They said no, we're going to have to tell him he has to retire, you come in and take the job. I told them I would have to have more money than what you're paying him. They said, "O.K., we'll pay it." I asked them to be excused and I went out and talked to Mr. Daley. He says no, he didn't want to retire. He says he would like to work another year. He would like to finish paying for his house. I

says, "You weren't planning on retiring?" He said no. That's all I wanted to know. So I went back in and told them I wasn't interested. I was going back to Cincinnati. I wouldn't want to take the job, then have them shove him out and retire him.

You're management down there. As chief clerk you're management and as a storekeeper you're management. That's the difference. Anything below that was all Union. But those are management positions and I worked for the management position at that time, so that was the time I gave up as division chairman of the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. Then when I took this other job that was it.

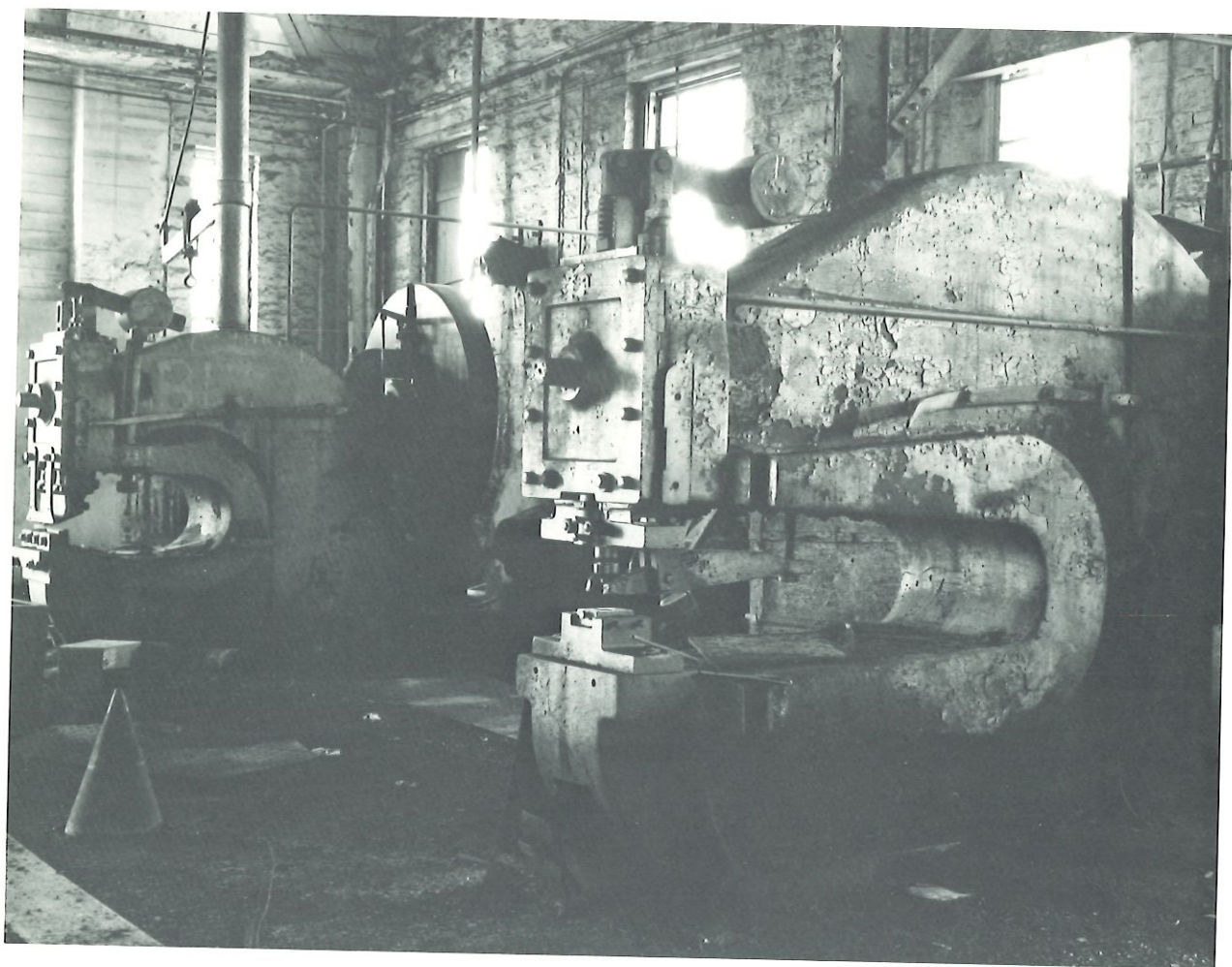
I fell into it. I was very fortunate. I was at the right place at the right time. I gave up thirty-eight years of seniority, I was fifth man on the seniority roster. Everybody said you were crazy to leave all that, you got a job regardless of what happens, and all this. Jobs weren't everything. Money was the difference. You go where the money is. That's the way it is. I enjoyed all the years I worked on the railroad, that was for sure.

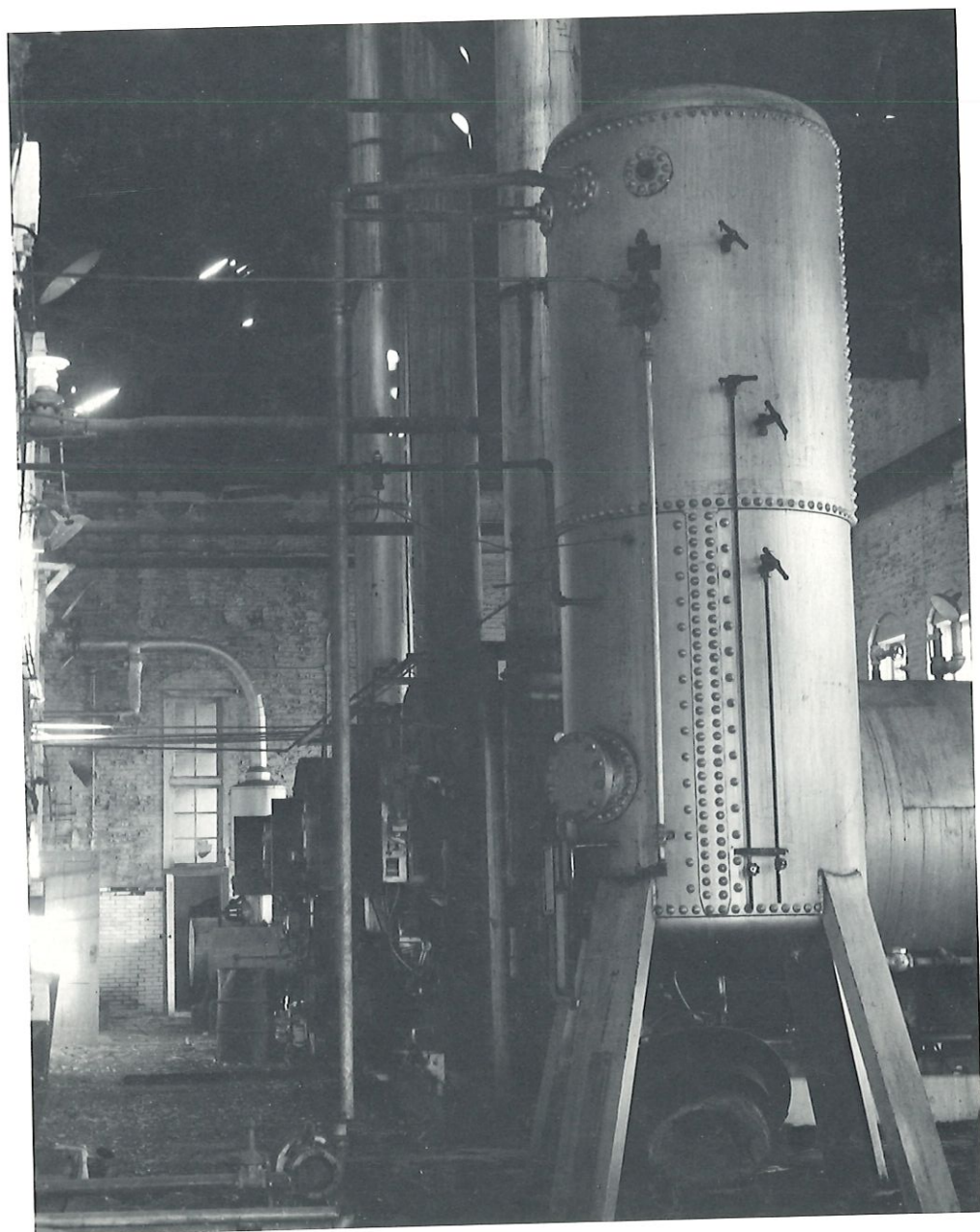
Interviewer: Mary Beth Heine

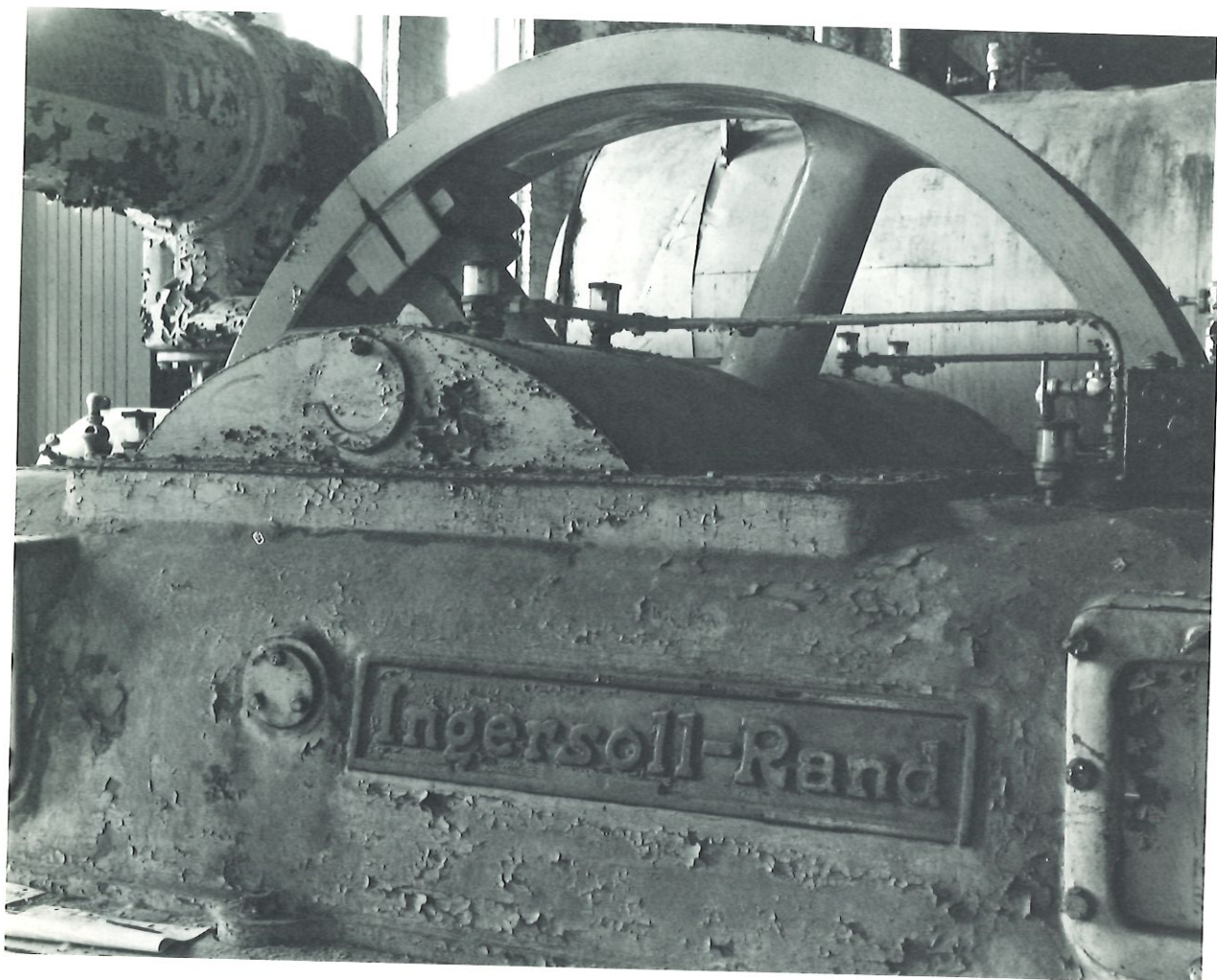
The C & A Shops, 1981

Photographs by Earl Dunbar

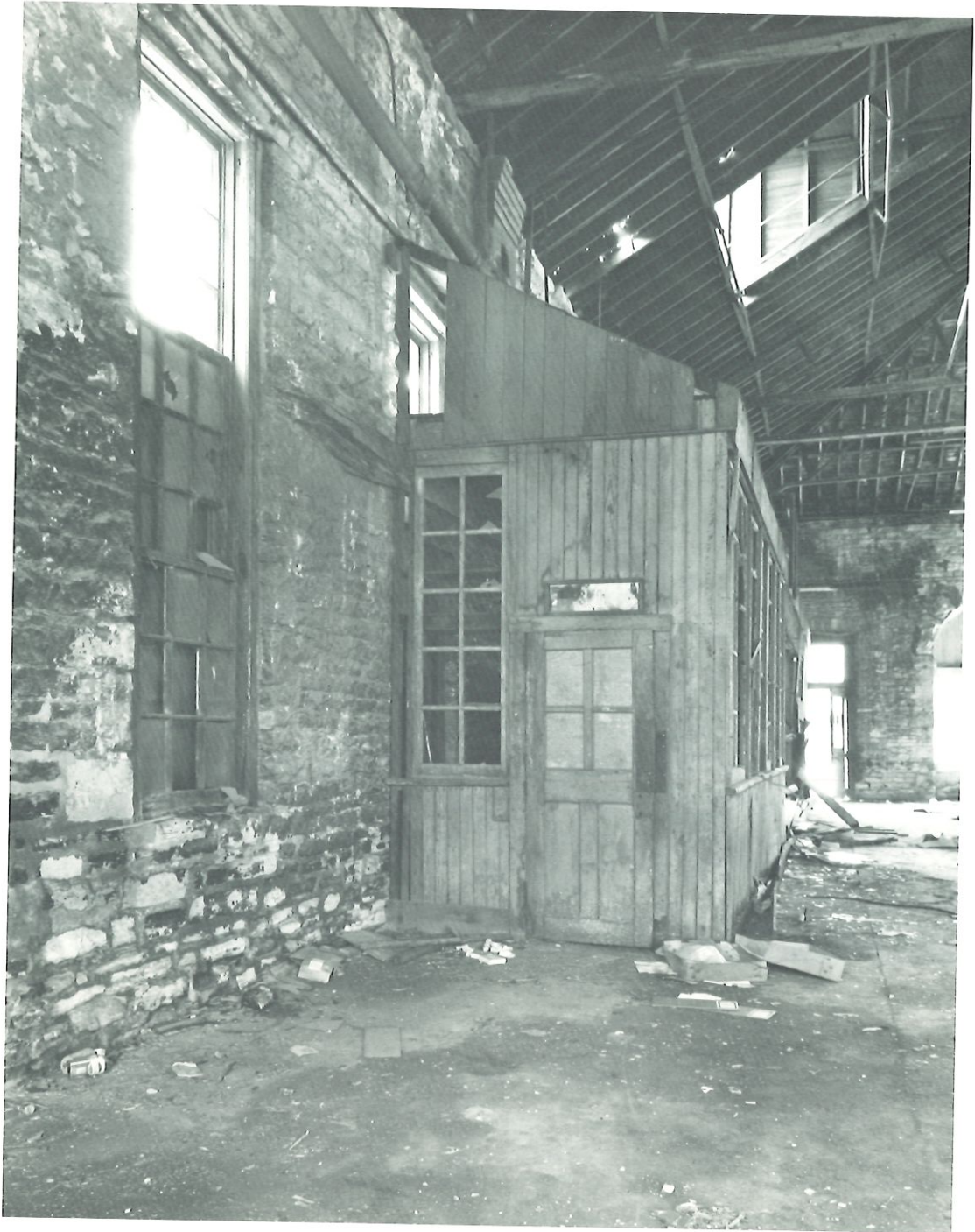
















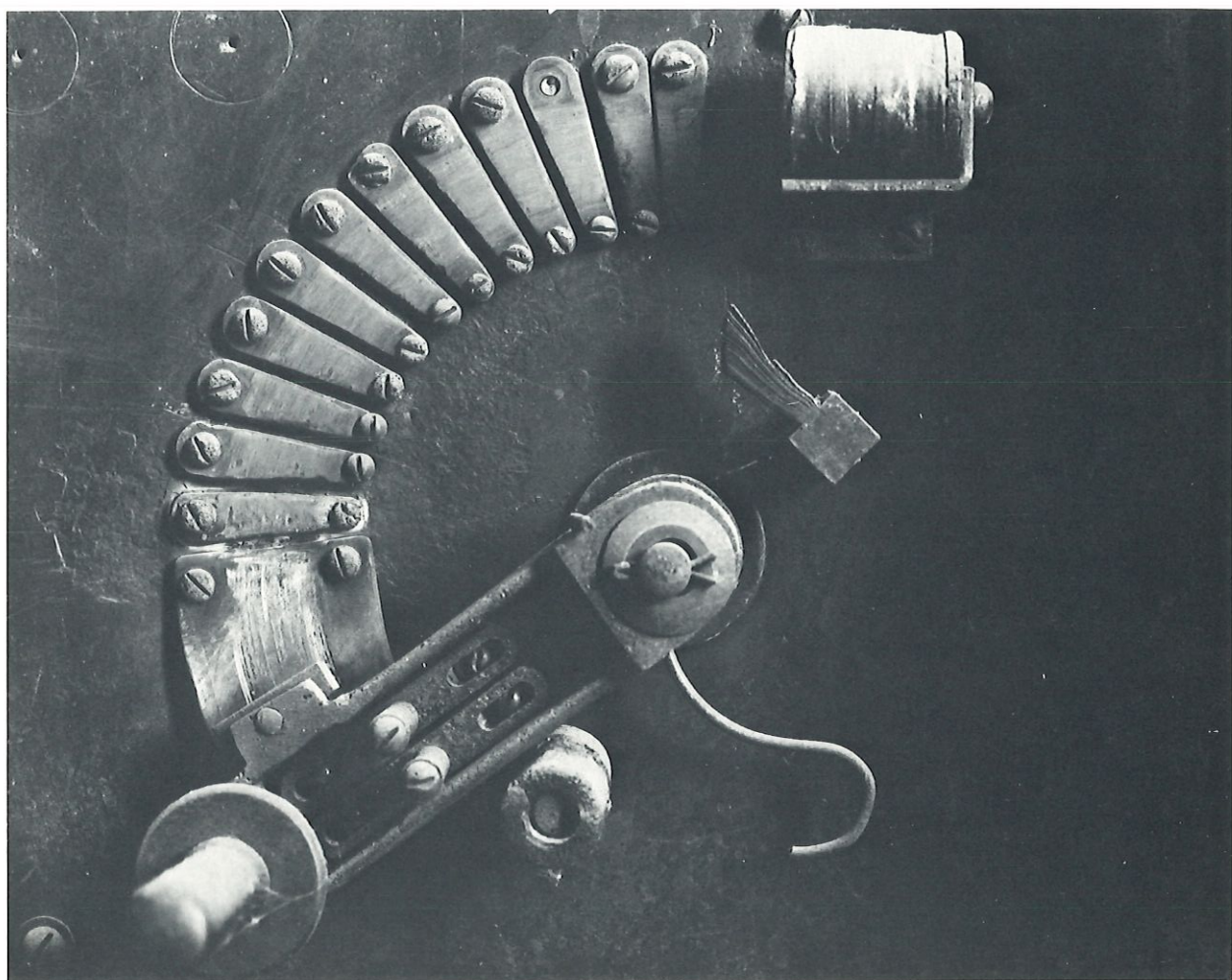












there I got a job as a machinist apprentice. And in that day a machinist apprentice was a valued job, you pretty near had to have influence to get one.

I wanted to tell ya somethin' else I forgot. When I first started to work in 1919 in the Bloomington Shops we had a ten-hour day. And we'd go to work at 7 o'clock and work 'till 5 in the evening. In the wintertime it was dark when you went to work and it was pitch black when you went home.

Bad Water

Before that strike (1922) I was actually involved in; I was involved in the Alton sick. This crick down here was Sugar Crick and it was sewage. It wasn't intentional but they piped it into our drinkin' water. I think seventeen people died, and my brother, I don't think in his lifetime got over it entirely.

It was the railroad. Their own men, when they made this coupling, made the wrong coupling. And, but this was the bad part of it and (there were) things that made some mad. Even when they found out what was wrong they wouldn't change it and we'd go out on a strike to make them take care of things. Finally we struck the whole outfit and marched around the streets uptown in Bloomington.

Finally we ended up, they had the superintendent, that oh, he was terrible and he was the one that wouldn't let them change things. And we stopped a passenger train right beside his office and picked him up and took him out of Bloomington until we got done with the march in the streets and that and they gave in to us. They put in drinkin' water in five gallon jugs, until they could put in all new pipe to put city water in. We finally got it but there was some people never ever got over that in their lifetime. I had an assistant foreman who was older than I was in every respect and I don't think, I wouldn't say up until he died a few years ago, he ever got over it.

In the end they (the railroad) settled for it. They held a trial, the state conducted it and they paid for hospital, doctors and so much money for each day lost. But not very much.

1922 Strike

I was on picket duty a good many times at night. We were the only ones, so we got along and they put us behind the posts and trees and stuff more than once when they started their

shooting. It was bad. They even shot one woman with a .30 caliber rifle and the bullet went through her spine and paralyzed her for life. She was innocent. She was in a Ford roadster with some guy and they went past, but they were on the street, not on the property. But the soldiers were at the, where you went into the property and they called 'em to halt and they didn't stop and so they shot her.

They (the strikebreakers) never went off of the property. And I think they slept in, like, coaches and stuff like that. Of course we didn't get to sleep in 'em. Some of them were railroad people. And some of them were farmers and some of 'em were just bums from Chicago. They'd bring a trainload in.

And one day when I went to work I saw it written on the side of the firebox with white chalk. It said, "We got the dollars, now you can have the cents."

A few of them stayed. But even they didn't last, 'cause they harrassed them so much and everything. I saw one of them had his arm caught in a drill and it drug him around the top of the machine like that and ended up by tearin' his shirt and throwin' him out in the walkway. Nobody went near him. Awful bitter. Lifetime—I'm not talkin' about strikes they had that we had to have picket lines. But even as foremen we didn't cross picket lines.

Ending Apprenticeship

I served nine months as a car apprentice and quit when they put me out in the snow. In April of '21 I started to serve my apprenticeship. Then I was three-and-a-half months on the '22 strike and we had to make that all up.

And then they laid us all off when we finished our apprenticeship. They wouldn't hire ya. Not 'til after a year. You could be without a job, serve your time there. They told machinists, they weren't hiring. Some tramp would come in the yard lookin' for a job and they hire him. And by the time I was done makin' up the lost time it was October the 5th, 1925.

And they tell you to come back in about two years and talk to us again after you've learned something. And that's what you served your apprenticeship for.

And I got out on my time on Friday and they gave me my apprenticeship thing. They told me to come back the next morning and they'd give me the certificate. I said, "Well, I won't be back." They said, "Well, you'll need

it." I said, "No, I won't need it." And I never did get to go back and get it.

I went to Chicago and I got a job at the Chicago Junction Railroad in the back shop. And I worked for only a short time. And I quit and went to the Northwestern 'cause the Northwestern had a good reputation and a monstrous back shop at 42nd and Lake Street. I stayed there for a few months and then they needed a machinist at Glen, our Chicago freight terminal, for the C & A Railroad. I worked there for just a short time and I left on Christmas Eve, that made me real popular. And went to work the following day for the C & A as a machinist at Joliet. South Joliet. And all the seniority that I had as a machinist was all at Joliet. I never had any in Bloomington.

Then I didn't work very long as a machinist and I went on the foreman job, and I was fifty-three years on the foreman job. They transferred me then some years later back to Bloomington but this time as night general roundhouse foreman. And practically all the people there, like the foreman and the machinists and all them, I had worked under all of them as I served my apprenticeship.

McGraw's Early Days

My grandfather and grandmother, were born in Ireland, they came over and they landed in New York and there was nothin' there. So they went to Boston and nothin' there, and in all the windows there was signs "Irish need not apply." And they went to Chicago and in Chicago they told 'em they were building railroad shops in Bloomington. So my grandfather and grandmother came to Bloomington and he helped build the early buildings.

My name is T. F. McGraw, and I was born July the 8th, 1907. I graduated from St. Patrick's School and then I went to high school, let's see that was 1922 I started high school and went two years and I decided I wasn't gonna go back to school. So I got a job down in the Storeroom. I worked that summer; boy, did I quit, and I went back to high school. Then I graduated from high school in 1926. I graduated in June, right around June 1st, I couldn't tell you the exact date. So then, let me see, who'd I meet on the street? Some fella said, "Why don't you go down, they're huntin' for an apprentice boy?" I said O.K., so I went down. H. B. Elson was there, wasn't he? And

he put me on as a tool carrier like Thornton and these fellas talked about and I carried tools for about three months.

After three months he put me on as apprentice boy and I worked for Johnny Holland, Jack Holland they called him, down in the freight engine gang. I finally got out of my time in 1930, I think it was May or someplace right around there. Well, in the meantime, of course, I couldn't get a job because I had to leave for a year, so Iber Maloney was last shift foreman up at, he was general foreman up at Glen. Anyhow, he and Austin called me up and he said, "I got a job for two weeks at Glen, including Christmas Day and New Year's." So I went up there 'cause boy, I was hungry for money. So I went up there but they wouldn't put me on the roster. So then I come back and after I come back I was home, and it musta been a couple months after that Johnny Hedges(?) got killed down at Funk's Grove. Hit a mule and the Model T turned over. He was a machinist over for Jimmy Dunn. Nobody wanted to work for Jimmy Dunn.

Anyhow, Blondie Nelson called me up and he says, "I want you to go to work for Jimmy Dunn." And I said, "Oh, I don't think I could work for him as a machinist." I says, "Boy, them other fellas." "Well," he says, "nobody wants the job." So, and then he said, "Jimmy wants to talk to you." So Jimmy said to me, "Tom, you and I always got along, you come down, we'll get by." So I went down there and I worked three months.

So then, after I got down there, Roger Ewalt was general chairman, he didn't want to put me on the roster. So I went to Dick Conroy. He said, "Oh yes you will." I forget what job he had. He went over to see Gregory. So finally I got on there as a machinist on the roster. Well, that ticked him and then, of couse, every time you turned around you got laid off. I worked a couple weeks off and on in Joliet.

After I got laid off there, I knew I was only gonna work about two weeks at the most. I got a job over at the E J & E (Elgin, Joliet & Eastern) Railway, and I went over there and you know, I was doin' pretty good. And my dad called me up one night. I must have been there six months, I guess. My dad called and he said, "Aw, you can come back home because they'll put you on the last shift in the Machine

Shop." Well, by God, Friday night I quit. So I come back and we got down there in Bloomington that Monday afternoon and do you know, I thought I had a job. They had to give you a four-day notice then. Sundberg(?) come around and give me notice, I was already laid off before I started. I called that guy back up in Joliet, Hector was his name. And you know what he said—I asked him for a job back and he said nope. He said, "You red-haired sonof-a-bitch, you'll quit again so I ain't gonna hire ya." I never will forget that. That's just what he told me. So then after that I did pretty good. I was workin' the second shift in Bloomington and they made me foreman there, that was in 1941.

Steam Days

Belz: And I'll tell ya another thing. There was one of them big U.S. engines, what was the number of that?

McGraw: 885.

Belz: That was what it was.

McGraw: We always called them Standard Oil engines, didn't we, Thornton?

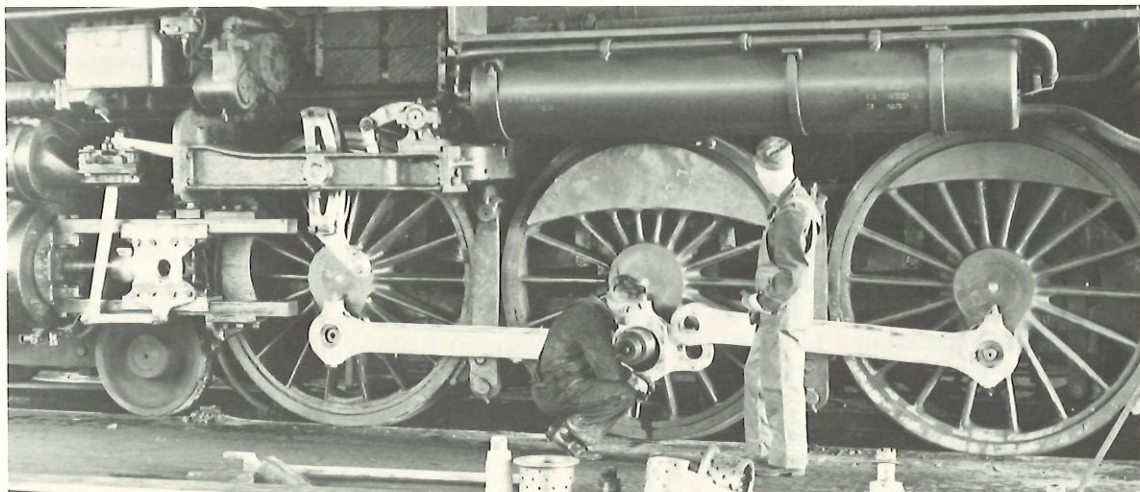
Belz: That 885 come in from Kansas City into Roodhouse one morning, it got in there about 2 o'clock in the morning. And that main rod on the right side was so hot it was almost white. So I called, I didn't know what to do, we didn't have no extra engines. I called up Bloomington. They said, "We did this before and it'll work. It'll get it to Bloomington." They said, "Take the fire hose and put the hose," it was in mild weather, they said, "put the fire hose on it

and let it run. We don't care, the crew was called."

They said, "Cool it down and when you get so you can put a wrench on there, get that floater out," and by the way that floater come out in pieces. And I had a brass bushing, and Bill Donnelly was down there so we had some extra ones down there; we probably had a dozen extra ones. So we got the bushing out in pieces, it all come out and we looked around and we couldn't see any cracks or anything so we went in there and we got the sizes and he says, "It don't have to be actual sizes." And you know, we went in there and we got one that was exactly for the outside diameter. And Joe had to take a little cut on the inside. And we come out and we put that brass in and we got it goin'. He says, "Don't pay any attention to that crew," he says, "to hell with 'em." He says, "I want that engine to go through." And we had about a three or three-and-a-half hour delay but we got the damn engine out of town. I called Bloomington.

Things like that happen you know. Just almost the impossible, but them old heads you know, they had for every condition that would come up, they had an answer for it. Now don't think they didn't.

McGraw: And then another thing—we had to bring up this, you remember this. We had the coal chutes down there. So they was gettin' awful old and they dropped the coal down in the pits and then they held it up, had a loader who loaded it up on chains. They made 'em in Chicago. Anyhow the buckets would go up there and dump the coal and then they'd run



Setting a passenger locomotive bearing, November 1943. (Pantagraph photo)

the engine down and pull down the spout and put the coal in.

Well, finally they was so bad House and them guys decided they was gonna buy Red Devil coal loaders. Oh, my God. They was oversize corn dumps. That's the truth. Oh boy! And they brought them down there and they put 'em up, and after they got them up they tore the coal chutes all down. And then, were they terrible! In the cold weather, all the water got down and the coal was always froze comin' out of the car and you had to keep two men out there breakin' that coal up to get 'em through the damn grates.

I got one more too, I forgot to tell ya. You remember this one. Well, after they did away with the coal chutes they had a clam shell out there. And that's when they used to have an overhead crane too, a travel crane to clean out the cinder pit. Well one time Blievernicht was runnin' that crane. He picked up a nigger, been in there about two weeks and he was cooked white. Picked him up by the leg out there. Oh, it was terrible. And them are the things that these guys don't know about. Weatherford, he was a fireman. He was down there one night goin' to work, was it night? Yeah. He stepped off the engine or somethin' and he fell in the cinder pit and Dick Berry was comin' by there and the engine run over him and cut the hand off and one leg. Dick Berry took balin' wire and tied him up and kept him from bleedin' to death. And he lived and he turned out to be the biggest bootlegger in Bloomington.

Under the B & O

McGraw: And another one now, when the B & O took over the Chicago & Alton, old George Emerson was down here. Emerson, he liked the Bloomington Shops.

Belz: He was president (Motive Power Chief) of the B & O.

McGraw: And anyhow, him and Burkley was general superintendent. And Burkley was out of the Mt. Clare Shops. That's Mt. Clare, Pennsylvania (Maryland). When he come through the shops the first time, we had this great big cast iron roll, three great big rolls. They had the roll, crane hangin' up, oh, a 25-ton, way up there in the attic, you know, up there in the Boiler Shop. When he saw that he says, "Boy, now I know why you guys can do good work,

you got the tools."

They appropriated \$100,000 to do this work in Bloomington, in so many months. And of course they used these fellas, at that time of the layoff, four days a week, some of 'em four, if you was married and had a family, and then another gang'd come in. But anyhow, they got them engines over a period, I guess, of about a year and a half, wasn't it, or two years?

Belz: I guess it was. All of that.

McGraw: And Schneeburger was general foreman, wasn't he, Schneeburger? And Schneeburger. After they had everybody workin', on the B & O, when they got an engine out of Bloomington, boy, they wanted them engines. They hated to see 'em taken away. You remember that. Boy, you could go anyplace in the world and they'd say, "Boy, we like them engines from Bloomington." And those fellas did a beautiful job rebuildin' 'em.

These people, don't you know, they don't realize how good this Shop was and the good class of mechanics we had. You could take any mechanic from Bloomington that was out of a job as machinist, we called 'em boomers then. When they'd bum around the country and they'd tell 'em they came from the C & A they all got a job, they hired 'em all. Wouldn't hire anybody else but they'd hire you.

Belz: When we put this spot system in the Bloomington Shops we got an entire locomotive out of the shop every day. Every day of the week. They'd spot the job here and pick 'em up at night and bring 'em, set 'em down here. We'd do all the crane work at night.

Early Diesel Days

McGraw: I never will forget it, they brought Diesel 50. The 50, and nobody could get it workin' but the guys around Bloomington and that was in 1937, wasn't it?

Belz: Yep.

Eisenberg: Along in that time.

McGraw: In 1937. And old Ludwig was the boss, so H. B. Arthur sent me over there and he says, "You go over there and he'll put you to work on that diesel." I went over there and the first job he gave me as a helper, old Martin Thrasher. Remember big old Martin Thrasher?

Belz: Not changin' the subject any, but that



Louis Bailey, machinist, and G. L. Higgs check diesel crankshaft parts. 1937. (Pantagraph photo)

auxilliary generator, air compressor on that 50, they had more trouble with that than anything. It would make a trip or two or blow a gasket or it'd blow up or somethin', and they'd bring it in the Back Shop there and you worked on it. I think you straightened that damn thing out.

McGraw: I was gonna tell you about that. So, they give me Martin Thrasher as a helper and I said, "Martin, now these are my tools, these are not company tools," because they don't have any tools at that time. And I said, "Don't you let anybody come down and borrow 'em when I ain't lookin'." So he didn't and so Ludwig, he put me on there on that engine, that six cylinder Winton engine, four cycle, and we come and we stripped it all down and then he says, "When you get that job done start on that air compressor." And that was a water-cooled air compressor. Four cylinder, remember them big pistons in that sucker? You see it was water-cooled. So we tore that all outa there

and, anyhow, we got that all tore out and we got it stripped up there and old Ludwig come by. He says, "Well, you guys did pretty good so I'll keep you over here."

So I got to stay over there, and about that time, you guys remember this, they burned an engine up. And then, Louie Bailey and those guys filed $1/32$ of an inch off the crankshaft on that one. By God, filed it. They filed it. You remember that? And I never will forget that, you know, I thought, "Hell, they'll never file that round." By God, they did, but they kept on it and they just, boy, they used that old lampblack, don't you know, and put it on the engine.

Belz: Went out and went to work and then . . .

McGraw: Oh yes, and we never had much trouble after that with diesels. So then, oh, I must have, Denny made me foreman on the second shift.

Belz: Tom was our first diesel foreman.

McGraw: Now another thing. When I was over in the Back Shop they had four motor cars. They had Winton gas engines in 'em, boy, they had buckets in 'em about like that. Six cylinder and they was all hooked up to these General Electric main generators. They was so damned old but they never caused any trouble, and they was always out of balance. So then they come up and they brought ten 671 diesel engines, them big truck engines and they brought four gear boxes unassembled, so we assembled them over in the Machine Shop.

Well, after we got 'em all together we tested 'em. After they get the first one they ran, I think it ran 10 miles outside of Bloomington, and it broke the liners right in two. They had two of those little air holes about, it was $1/4$ " or $5/16$ " air holes in the liners where they blowed the air into 'em. Well then, they'd drag 'em back. Oh that went on for a long time, in the meantime they sent two men down here from the factory. Judd and Baldwin. Now General Motors, they were the most lousiest people there ever was. Baldwin was an **** and it'd make you mad. He could make anybody mad, and Judd, who was a smoothy. And Judd never had a pencil, you never saw a pencil on him or a piece of paper.

So they'd work these engines up and finally these guys all got mad under Thornton, I forget how many they ruined, and every night

they was overhaulin' one engine, puttin' in new liners and they always had 'em assembled. Had the pistons and the rods and had the heads built up and the pan was all cleaned off. Well finally they all got so damned mad, and we said, "Why in the hell don't you get some sense about them holes in them gas liners? Why don't you make one big hole or make it like a figure 8 or somethin' like that to do it?" Boy, Old Judd, when they made that statement to him, he walked back down to the toilet, he closed the door so nobody seen and he pulls out his little black book and he writes that down. The next day, the next afternoon he went and he said to Honness, "How soon could he get a train outa here for Chicago?" He took off and went to Chicago and give 'em them ideas and he was back in the morning, and by God, you know, he says, "Well we got some new liners comin', we're gonna fix it up." And do you know, it took about three or four weeks I think to get the liners. After they got them liners in, they never had any more trouble. Them engines were perfected right down here in the Engine House at Bloomington. I don't care what they say, and Judd got all the credit.

Well anyhow, Judd, after it was all said and done, they ran some of them engines a couple a hundred thousand miles before they ever had to overhaul 'em after that. So Judd, General Motors thought that he figured this all out himself, they give him a new Chevrolet. Boy, the big Chevrolet they made at that time. They give him a \$5,000 bonus and sent him and his wife for a month over to the Hawaiian Islands.

World War II

Belz: We had to just crowd everything in and get everything out of it that we could. I even run some (locomotives) that shouldn't have ever have gone over to the Turntable here. But we had nothin' else.

Eisenberg: That's right.

Belz: That's what you'd use because it had wheels under it. One night they found the springs all broke up and everything in the draft gear on the tender. And they had a trainload of ammunition out in the yard. We got it walkin'. I put her out the way it was and I told the engineer, "Now," I said, "You got no springs in your draft gear." "But," I said, "it's not cracked, it's not broke and if you don't want all the slack to run off," I said, "set your brake, leave it set

until you stop and don't slack it. And you won't have trouble." He said, "Don't worry, we'll get by." And Jim Honness was standin' there, he was the general foreman, and you should have seen him, great big beads of sweat stood out all over his face. And the next day that engineer come in and he wanted to take back to Roodhouse the engine he brought in. And he asked for it. I said, "Aw, there's one out there ready for ya." And he said, "You're afraid to run it back."

McGraw: And that was the time, don't you know, during the war when the **** was drawin' the swastikas on the door over there. Austin kept tellin' everybody, "Don't cause no trouble, just get the American Legions down here. Don't cause no trouble."

Belz: Just try and find out who the hell done it.

McGraw: But hell, 's brother was doin' it. They knew who was doin' it. And he always walked that goosetstep. Yeah, the German Army one, somethin' like that, the goosetstep, don't you remember the boilermaker helper? Swastikas, they was drawin' 'em on the damn boards where nobody could see 'em, up there on the north side of the Boiler Shop. That was the farthest board.

He was a German. He could barely speak any English. But he had four or five brothers that was perfect. But he was the oldest one of 'em.

Belz: He was the outcast.

McGraw: And then, don't you know, we used to, Charlie House was the bigshot on the railroad, he come up here and I had the War Bond drive goin' on and you remember this, you guys, Austin, he was there and he says, "We're not sellin' these War Bonds like we should be." So he called a great big meeting and he had Charlie House there and Frank Gunman was the big labor leader for the Steamfitters and the Tinnners, and he'd get up and he'd give a hell of a good speech down in front of the Storeroom where we had the new flag pole.

Belz: Yeah.

McGraw: You remember the big flag pole we had stood up down in that axle? And that flag pole was put up there and so the next day they run around and hunted up down in the drivin' box gang. He was runnin' the drill

press. That sonofabitch, he wouldn't buy any War Bonds. And he was a Hungarian from up north of Seminary Avenue. You know what, the union gang in the shop, the machinists take him out and string him up. And the word got back. Well, by God, when Austin and them guys got through talkin' to old Tony, he was glad to buy 'em. Because the fellas wouldn't work and they was gonna keep him on the job, I remember that.

Supervisor's Union

Belz: When we started as foreman we had minimum twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

McGraw: You got a day off, by God, whenever they felt like lettin' you have it.

Belz: And when I was about 22 or 23 years old I had what all these doctors called a goiter. Everybody in this vicinity, they'd say had a goiter. From the water. Absence of anything that resembled iodine. And six or seven said that I had a goiter. Our own family doctor said no, and I was standing looking out the window. I said to my mother, I said, "I think I'll go to Mayo's." She said, "I think that'd be a good idea." And I said, "I got an hour and a half to get ready and go." I got ready and went to Mayo's. They assigned me to doctorin' and that and I had no end of examinations and they made the standard test they made at that time for goiters. And everyday they gave it to me it went down, down, down. And they finally assigned me to one doctor and that was the one that finished up with me. And I'd a got mad if I'd a known it, he was a psychiatrist.

It was nervousness. And he said to me, "How many hours a day do you work?" I said, "A minimum 12-hour day, seven days a week." He said, "How much vacation a year?" I said none. He said no human being on earth could be all right and do that. He said, "Look at the hours you're workin' " and he said, "Call it work if you wish but I work thirty-five hours a week. You'll never be all right as long as you work more hours than that." And he said, "One thing you should do now, you can't get the vacations, you can lay off, do it twice a year." He said, "Go home and have them tonsils taken out but don't let anybody operate on that goiter, you haven't got one. You sure don't." And that's what it was.

We got an agreement and we came under the American Railway Supervisor's Association and here's the rest of that. I was the assistant general chairman for twenty-four years. We got conditions, we got paid for lost time, we got vacations. I had five weeks vacation, but not until we organized. And finally gave ya—somebody related to you died or somethin' like that. They'd dock you for goin' to the funeral. But not once the organization came. If they were in a certain degree of relationship you got paid.

McGraw: We organized it here in Bloomington ourselves with Mr., oh what the hell was it, Mr., what was that guy's name, Tehaney? Maybe it was Tehaney, and he talked to Bob Penn and he talked to me and he talked to Casey and talked to all of us, see. And you know what Casey said? "Aw to hell with ya, I wouldn't join it anyway." And they forced him to join it. So I was runnin' oil one morning there in the cylinder and he come around to me and he introduced himself and told me.

Belz: He was very nice.

McGraw: Always was. He was fine. And he says, "We're trying to get the place organized," and he says, "We want to know how you think of the line, what's your position." And I said, "Well, I'll go along with ya." And he talked to all of 'em, but that Casey, he wouldn't. We never had no trouble with the company.

Belz: No.

McGraw: No, they was all right.

Belz: Brock, the president, even boasted in a speech he gave in Wall Street. He said the supervisors are organized on the GM & O and we have never ever had a board case. Never did have a board case.

McGraw: And another thing now, I told you just the other day, the three of us. I think we're the only three all belonging to the Machinists, we never quit the International of the Machinists and Aerospace Workers, but we were also in the American Supervisors Associates. I showed you my card, Thornton's got his and Ray's got his.

Belz: About oh, a month or two before the final consolidation I was talkin' to the young man that was head of personnel for Non-

operating and his sister was his assistant. They were both nice to deal with though. And he said to me, he said, "How long have you been general chairman?" I said twenty-four years. He said, "How many investigations do you think you've had?" I said, "Roughly fifty." He said, "How many did you lose?" I said, "Not one." He said, "We have instructions so no more investigations with supervision."

McGraw: They couldn't beat him anyway.

Belz: I says, "Why?" Said, "What's the use of holdin' 'em, you're winnin' 'em all. It's just a waste of time."

McGraw: I wanta butt in right now on that deal that he's talkin' about. Let me tell you somethin', when Thornton was general chairman, the railroad, as far as havin' trouble, they never had trouble. Old J. J. (Honness) used to say, "Don't you guys cheat me and I won't cheat you." And boy, I never will forget that, we never had much trouble.

Belz: No.

When I was assistant general chairman I met with the group in Mobile and the contract counsel was a lawyer. And I served notice on 'em with six articles in it and I was requesting my 106. And when I was done I said to the lawyer, "I've got another one." I told him how it was and he said, "You haven't done notice for us." I said, "Now I have." He said, "They won't honor that." I said, "Well, I didn't care whether they do or not. I'll go back home and I'll serve formal notice on you and I'll be back." He said, "You wait'll I go talk to Mr. Brock." He talked to Brock and came back and I got my severance, and then I was done. He said too, he said, "What is your formal education?" I said, "Eighth grade at St. Patrick's School in Bloomington." "Do you mean that was the end of your formal schooling?" And I said yes. He said, "Did you have any correspondence school?" and I said no. "Only in drafting." And here I got everything. One more than I went for. As I was goin' out the door I put my briefcase under my arm and I happened to look back, and when I looked back this contract counselor was settin' there and he was goin'. I said, "What's the matter with you?" He said, "That educational background of yours." I said, "Anything wrong with it?" He said no.

And that same fellow in the last meeting that we had with the IC, meeting in Chicago. We had a table like this that seated twenty-seven and he was opposite me at the table and he said, "I'll forewarn you people that he will know more about our financial affairs than we know." I said, "That's not surprising, I know more about your business than you do." And he said, "He has connections with the Continental Illinois National Bank, where we do our banking." I did have. "But that wasn't where," he said. I explained the entire proposed merger to them before they knew it themselves. And it was the truth, I knew more about it than they did, and it didn't come through that bank where they thought it did.

Merger

McGraw: We had the Chicago & Alton and then the B & O come in made it the Alton and then the GM & O and then the IC. ICG, that's four. Every one of 'em got worse. As far as the men was concerned the B & O was perfect. You never had no trouble. But the men we had here that was over us that caused our trouble. I can still hear them guys cuss.

Eisenberg: Well, I can too. The Gulf, Mobile in a way wasn't too bad.

McGraw: Oh no, they were good, I was gonna bring that up. Thornton, you wanta talk? I'm doin' all the talkin', but Thornton can tell you this.

Belz: You know how many machinists we got here at Bloomington workin' now? We got one machinist. That's all we've got.

McGraw: So anyhow, we had under the GM & O, they were a pretty good outfit. I was there until 1972, what was it, in September, when old Venerable come down there and we had to get the loudspeakers out. Well anyhow, he told us all how he was gonna lay us all off. Abolish the jobs. And Thornton was the oldest man on the roster as a Foreman, and I was number two at that time on the roster.

So he got us over in the office and J. J. Honness was my boss. He was a general foreman. We was standin' there talkin' and he was gettin' ready to give his speech about how he was gonna lay us all off. The men trust the foreman, and he said to Honness, "Jimmy, all you got around here is a buncha junk." Thornton,

remember that? That red spot in Honness, between his eyes? When got mad that spot come up, I don't know what the hell they ever did, then that spot come up in there and so I saw it comin' up and I said, "Aw, Jimmy, don't listen to him." I was standin' alongside him and he said, "Tom, I'm gonna hit that sonofabitch before the day's out." So, after he told us all how he was gonna lay us off, then he said, "I want all you fellas in here and you too Honness," and Honness says, "Off it."

So he had you all come over from the Engine House and got us over there and Honness says, "Tom, I'm not goin' in there, because if I do I know I'll lose my job because I'm gonna get in a fight." I said, "Oh Jimmy, I'll tell you what he's gonna say. Hell, you don't have to, don't get mad at him, let him go, he don't know anything." So we got over there, he told you, wasn't you the first one Thornton, he told that they was goin' to abolish all these jobs and Thornton says, "You're not gonna abolish my job." He says, "Why?" Thornton says, "I'm number one on the roster and I can bump anybody, we got a contract."

Belz: Yeah, that set him back.

McGraw: Oh, that set him back!

Belz: Had a big contract on the IC.

McGraw: So anyhow, I got to stay there longer and after they lay 'em off so many years, then I worked in the Engine House. If anybody laid off out there sometimes, Honness would send me out there. I worked, you know like a day off or somethin' like that, I had to watch both places. And then Honness left, he was the general foreman, Thornton would be the general foreman. And so we got by there and he started scrappin' everything. Then the ICG come up and they never had any tools, they

never had nothin'. We had the better outfit than they did and they come down there and they'd bring the guys and claim the day. So hell, you didn't know whether he was a foreman or not. He wanted this machine and another guy wanted that machine. And they'd pick everything right out from under ya. And the GM & O, we didn't have no power at all. And they'd take the machine. Remember that brand new drill press I got 'em to buy in the Tool Room? That the first thing that guy spotted, by God. That was the one he wanted.

Belz: It wasn't a year old.

McGraw: No, by God, and that's the one he wanted. And then he spotted that big lathe that cost 25,000 bucks in the Tool Room.

Belz: I'll bet you think we're somethin', we're givin' 'em all hell.

McGraw: No, no, this is the truth, the truth absolutely.

Belz: That is the truth, every bit of it.

McGraw: I don't care what they say, boy, Thornton'll back us up on that. He's . . .

Belz: Like we've been in the railroad game these many years and there's hundreds and hundreds of different people that you come in contact with; some of 'em don't know nothin' and they try to tell you what to do and you're tryin' to do the best you can and I think we all did. I think we all come out all right. We're all movin', we're up in arms.

McGraw: But we had some common sense.

Belz: But we had to fight for our rights.

Interviewer: Michael G. Matejka

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